

**The Politics and Philosophy of Wyndham
Lewis's Representations of the Body**

Trevor Lovelock Brent

Department of English and Comparative Literature,
Goldsmiths College, University of London

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, October 2005

GOLDSMITHS



8701908642

ACADEMIC REGISTRAR
ROOM 267
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
SENATE HOUSE
MALET STREET
LONDON WC1E 7HU

Abstract

The Politics and Philosophy of Wyndham Lewis's Representations of the Body examines the significance of representations of the body in the written work, both theoretical and fictional, of Wyndham Lewis. The central question of the thesis is: how does the body function as a ground for identity in Lewis's work? This question is addressed by looking at five thematic areas of Lewis's work, each of which forms the basis of a chapter: reality, mind-body dualism, gender, race, and the crowd.

The work of Slavoj Žižek is used to argue that Lewis's theoretical work is characterised by an antipathy towards 'the passion for the Real' and a desire to maintain a belief-sustained sense of 'reality'. As a result, the body has an ambivalent status: it is both an emblem of the 'reality' of the personality and a threat to it, representing its unavoidable 'thingness', its 'Real', as it were. This ambivalence is best expressed in Lewis's fiction, where the weaknesses and inconsistencies of his theories are dramatised and exposed.

Lewis's ambivalence towards the body results in a split between his theory and his rhetoric, a split that is particularly noticeable in his work on gender and race, in which initially racist and sexist language is undercut by his theoretical discomfort with the biological grounds of such rhetoric. This ambivalence characterises Lewis's often controversial politics, which cannot be understood without it being taken into account.

The thesis concludes that Wyndham Lewis had a fundamentally ambivalent attitude toward the body: it fails to provide a solid ground for identity, and yet it refuses to melt completely into air. This persistence of the body makes it a crucial sticking point, and Lewis produces compelling and contradictory images of it which attest to its implacable significance in his work.

Contents

Abbreviations	4
Introduction	7
Chapter One: Reality	20
Chapter Two: Mind-Body	70
Chapter Three: Gender	113
Chapter Four: Race	162
Chapter Five: The Crowd	212
Conclusion	256
Bibliography	268
Acknowledgements	292

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations for works by Wyndham Lewis are used in this thesis:

<i>ABR</i>	<i>The Art of Being Ruled</i> , ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989).
<i>ACM</i>	<i>America and Cosmic Man</i> , (London & Brussels: Nicholson & Watson, 1948).
<i>AG</i>	<i>The Apes of God</i> , (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1981).
'Artist'	'The Artist as Crowd', in <i>Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956</i> , ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989).
'Baby'	'The War Baby', in <i>Unlucky For Pringle: Unpublished and Other Stories</i> , eds. C. J. Fox & Robert T. Chapman, (London: Vision Press, 1973)
<i>BB</i>	<i>Blasting and Bombardiering</i> , (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967).
<i>C</i>	<i>The Childermass</i> , (London & New York: Calder Publications & Riverrun Press, 2000).
'Code'	'The Code of a Herdsman', in <i>The Essential Wyndham Lewis</i> , ed. Julian Symons, (London: Vintage, 1991).
'Crowd'	'The Crowd Master', in <i>Blast</i> , No. 2, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981).
<i>ES</i>	<i>Enemy of the Stars</i> in <i>Collected Poems and Plays</i> , ed. Alan Munton, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1979).

- 'Essay' 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time', in *Wyndham Lewis on Art: Collected Writings 1913-1956*, ed. Walter Michel & C. J. Fox, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969).
- 'Foxes' 'The Foxes' Case', in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956*, ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989).
- H* *Hitler*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931).
- HC* *The Hitler Cult*, (London: Dent, 1939).
- IL* *Imaginary Letters*, (Glasgow: Wyndham Lewis Society, 1977).
- LF* *The Lion and the Fox: The Rôle of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare*, (London: G. Richards, 1927).
- 'Meaning' 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. Bernard Lafourcade, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982).
- MWA* *Men Without Art*, ed. Seamus Cooney, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1987).
- P* *Paleface: The Philosophy of the 'Melting-Pot'*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929).
- 'Politics' 'The Politics of Artistic Expression', in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956*, ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989).
- 'Religions' 'Inferior Religions', in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. Bernard Lafourcade, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982).
- RL* *The Revenge for Love*, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrook, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1991).
- 'Spring-Mate' 'Cantleman's Spring-Mate', in *Unlucky For Pringle: Unpublished and Other Stories*, eds. C. J. Fox & Robert T. Chapman, (London: Vision Press, 1973)

Abbreviations

- T* *Tarr: The 1918 Version*, ed. Paul O’Keeffe, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1996).
- TWM* *Time and Western Man*, ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993).

Introduction

In this thesis I am going to explore the politics and philosophy of Wyndham Lewis's representations of the body. I will focus my research on Lewis's written work, not because there is nothing to be said about his pictorial representations of the body, but because there is too much, and to try and say it all here would be to stretch my thesis too wide and to spread my analysis too thin.

I will look mainly at the work Lewis produced between the two World Wars: his major theoretical work *Time and Western Man* (1927), parts of which are examined in detail in Chapter One and the Conclusion, forms the historical and conceptual centre of the material considered. I will consider both his fictional and non-fictional work, not only because Lewis produced valuable work in both genres, but also because he often treats similar themes in them, sometimes in significantly divergent ways.

My concern is not simply to map out the varying ways in which Lewis represented the body – the intricate verbal mechanics of the defamiliarisation and grotesque detail he specialised in and deployed to great effect – but to consider what the body meant for him and the role it played in his political and philosophical, as well as his imaginative, vision. I do not believe that these three spheres – the political, the philosophical, the imaginative – can be easily separated, if they can be separated at all; but neither do I believe that they can be simply amalgamated and treated as interchangeable and exactly equivalent. To give perhaps the most obvious example, the wrongness of Lewis's politics in the 1930s cannot be theorised away by sophisticated reference to his aesthetics, but the tangible achievements of his artistic work cannot be simply nullified by horrified mention of his support for Hitler.

My interest in the political, philosophical, and imaginative aspects of Lewis work crystallises around questions of the body, its representations,

and its significance. From the first reading of Lewis it is clear that the body is of great importance to him, that it is something which excites his imagination and which is focussed on with great intensity. However, it is not at all clear exactly what its significance is, and it raises many intriguing questions. Does Lewis represent the body as obdurately solid, or as something more malleable and fluid? Does Lewis see the body as a uniform and universal aspect of human existence, or as differentiated into various types? Does Lewis perceive the body as dangerous threat or as a reassuring support? Can the body be a ground for mind or is it always its enemy? Does Lewis indeed see any fundamental difference between body and mind? Does Lewis see the body functioning as a tool of modernity, or as an object that resists it? Does the body possess a greater or a lesser degree of reality than other objects in the world?

There are many such questions raised by Lewis's representations of the body, but the central question my thesis attempts to answer is: how does the human body function as a ground for identity in Lewis's work? I will consider this question with reference to five main themes, devoting a chapter to each of them.

My first chapter will look at Lewis's treatment of reality both in his theoretical work, represented here by *Time and Western Man*, and in his fiction, in particular the novels *The Childermass* (1928) and *The Revenge for Love* (1937). I will examine the notions of belief and reality that Lewis develops in *Time and Western Man* using the concept of 'the passion for the Real' developed by the Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, and argue that Lewis's opposition to such a 'passion' is a defining feature of his work, and one which puts him at odds with much modernist thinking. Using Lewis's own ideas as well as Žižek's theory, I will analyse the way in which reality and 'the Real' operate in Lewis's fiction, with particular focus on his representations of the body, and argue that his fiction exposes and dramatises inconsistencies and flaws in his theory. In particular, I will argue that in the fiction the absolute repression of 'the Real' advocated in *Time and Western Man* is shown to be a quixotic and unachievable task, and that the representation of the body plays a key role in this realisation.

The question of the reality or otherwise of the body is one which has significant implication for the question of grounding, and the way in which Lewis's characters struggle with the alternatives of an unreal and vapid groundlessness, and an inescapable grounding in ultra-real physical materiality is one which is reflected in his work as a whole.

Chapter Two will look at the way in which mind-body dualism operates in Lewis's work. Lewis is often portrayed by critics as being intrinsically a dualistic thinker, with dualism forming the conceptual core of his work. I will argue that although dualism is a central and unavoidable feature of Lewis's work it is best viewed as a conceptual strategy to manage reality and bestow meaning on the world, rather than as an innate personal predisposition. I will begin my analysis of Lewis's dualism by looking at the Vorticist 'play' *Enemy of the Stars* (1914) which, with its central conflict between the characters of Arghol and Hanp, is often taken as a prime example of Lewis's dualism. I will argue that if the play is read carefully another opposition, more fundamental than that between Arghol and Hanp, is revealed, and that if this deeper dualism is taken into account the work's social and political content is made clear, and its apparent atavism disappears. I will argue that the 'philosophy' of *Enemy of the Stars* is primarily concerned with creating distinction out of indistinctness, a concern that is also present in the essays Lewis included in his volume of short stories *The Wild Body* (1927). Both essays, 'Inferior Religions' and 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', attempt to define the theoretical basis for the stories that precede them, in particular focussing on Lewis's idea of the comic and laughter. Mind-body dualism is a key concept in both essays but is treated significantly differently, a divergence which indicates not only the importance of dualism for Lewis, but also its difficulty. The problems in grounding the distinction between laughter and laughed-at that Lewis has in these essays is symptomatic of his general problem of grounding difference. *Men Without Art* (1934) continues the concern with mind-body dualism and laughter, and tries to produce a theory of satire, an attempt which severely weakens any notion of distinction, and which finally renders dualism useless and absurd. This collapse of dualism represents

Lewis's realisation that metaphysical distinction cannot be grounded in the body, but that an absurd and uniform physicality can.

Gender is the focus of Chapter Three, which develops Chapter Two's fairly abstract inquiries into distinction by looking at a specific and controversial example of distinction, that between the feminine and the masculine. I begin my analysis by looking at Lewis's ideas about masculinity in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), where he proposes a non-naturalistic model of masculinity in which performance plays a central role. Lewis's notion of the performative nature of masculinity is a reaction to what he saw the decline of a traditional ideal of masculine responsibility in modernity and its subservience to social and political fashions. Rather than try to re-entrench a traditional, naturalistic masculine position Lewis moves towards abandoning a masculine position altogether, casting it as an historically produced illusion, rather than as an unalterable fact of life. The First World War is a crucial event in Lewis's history of masculinity, and I follow my analysis of *The Art of Being Ruled* with analyses of some of the short stories Lewis wrote during wartime: 'The French Poodle' (1916), 'Cantleman's Spring-Mate' (1917), and 'The War Baby' (1918). These stories, I will argue, prefigure his later ideas about masculinity, and show that even early in his career Lewis was calling into question a naturalistic and unproblematic idea of masculinity. In these wartime stories and in *The Art of Being Ruled* the male body is not seen as a support for masculinity, but as one of the factors which contribute to its downfall and exposure as an illusion. I continue my analysis by looking at Lewis's first published novel *Tarr* (1918), often taken to be an expression of a very masculine avant-garde position, but which, I will argue, is in fact subtly critical of such ideas and satirises rather than supports its main character's pretensions to distinction. The gendered body, I will argue, does not function as a ground for identity or distinction in Lewis's work, but rather works against such ideas, undermining them and exposing them to ridicule.

Chapter Four examines Lewis's ideas about race, which, due to his support for Nazism in the 1930s, is one of the most controversial areas of

his work. Rather than focus exclusively on his pro-Nazi works of the 1930s, I will look at how the concept of race develops in his theoretical work between 1927 and 1948, and analyse the changes in his thinking over this period. I start my analysis by looking at *The Lion and the Fox* (1927), Lewis's book on Shakespeare, in particular the appendix which deals with the question of race, its influence, or lack of, on Shakespeare, and its usefulness in the study of culture. *The Lion and the Fox* presents a fairly straightforward anti-race position which denies the agency of inherited characteristics in the development of genius. *Paleface* (1929) is more ambivalent in its attitude towards race, and a disparity between Lewis's rhetoric and his theory opens up, a disparity which defines much of his subsequent thinking. *Hitler* (1931), the first and most notorious of Lewis's pro-Nazi works, enthusiastically adopts Nazi race theory, but, I will argue, its enthusiasm is contradicted, perhaps even undermined, by the detail of Lewis's writing which still shows signs of the anti-race position of his earlier work. The move from *The Lion and the Fox* to *Hitler* is one which, I will argue, entails an almost complete reversal of Lewis's attitude to the body and to the determining power of race. That there is a reversal does not mean that *Hitler* can be explained away as an anomaly, but that any account of Lewis's support for Nazism must take it into account if it aspires to thoroughness. Lewis's thought undergoes another reversal, this time much more ostentatiously, in *The Hitler Cult* (1939), the book in which he publicly repudiated his support for Nazism, and which contains a limited yet significant critique of the theoretical basis of his previous positions. Lewis's repudiation of race reaches its apogee in *America and Cosmic Man* (1948) in which he praises the supposed racelessness of the United States. This late position, which seems to prefigure a vacuous and idealistic form of postmodernism indicates not so much Lewis's political rehabilitation but the fundamental weakness of his thinking about race, and his inability to come to terms with the body. By stressing the supposedly utopian groundlessness of America, Lewis does away with the body altogether and floats away into unreal and insignificant wishful thinking.

My final chapter looks at images of the crowd in Lewis's writing, and how his attitude towards the crowd, and towards the individual, changed throughout his career. I begin my analysis by looking at the two versions of 'The Crowd Master' (1915 & 1937), a short fictional piece which is set in part in the patriotic crowds of volunteers that assembled in London immediately before Britain's entry into the First World War. By comparing the two versions, I am able to define two different ways of looking at the crowd in Lewis's work, and examine his worry that the distinction between the individual and the crowd was a tenuous, perhaps even illusory one. This concern with distinction from the crowd is also dealt with in 'The Code of a Herdsman' (1917), a fictional set of instructions detailing how to go about being a 'Herdsman'. Although at first glance 'The Code' may seem like one of the most elitist of Lewis's writings, I will argue that it displays considerable anxiety about the possibility of distinction. Lewis's interest in the crowd continued into the 1920s and 1930s and a number of essays deal, at least in part, with this problem. I will look at 'The Politics of Artistic Expression' (1925), 'The Foxes' Case' (1925), and 'The Artist as Crowd' (1932), and examine the different attitudes towards the crowd and the possibility of distinction that they contain. Lewis's attitude towards the crowd was not a simple and static one, and changed over time, however two distinct poles are discernable in it: the idea of total separation from the crowd, and the idea of total integration with it. The interplay of these two poles is closely connected to Lewis's similar concerns with the body: can the body be the final guarantee of the individual's separation from the crowd, or is it material evidence of the individual's fundamental identity with it? It is the connection between the body and the crowd that provides the focus of my analysis of *The Apes of God* (1930), a novel in which the crowd plays an important part, even if it never positively appears. The last part of *The Apes of God*, 'The General Strike', is haunted by the spectres of both the revolutionary crowd and the internal organs of the body, and even though neither appears directly their power is made manifest. I will argue that in many ways both the crowd and the body can be seen to occupy the space of 'the Real' discussed in Chapter One.

My thesis concludes with an examination of Lewis's claim, made in *Time and Western Man*, that his identity is grounded in an organ of the body, namely the eye. This claim presupposes the possibility of the separation of a single organ from the body which contains it, and as such could be read as a manifestation of the fragmentation that much of *Time and Western Man* criticises. Lewis's claim is also complicated by his own criticism in *Time and Western Man* of vision as a way of approaching reality, and the gulf between his use of the eye as a ground for his own identity and this criticism of it as a basis for the philosophy of others is symptomatic of the ambivalence of the body in his thinking. This ambivalence towards the body as a ground for identity is, I will argue, the key feature of Lewis's thinking about and representations of the body, and one which helps understand the peculiarities of his political, philosophical, and imaginative work.

Before the thesis proper begins, I will look briefly at an early work of Lewis's which displays many of the issues and questions which will be of concern throughout this thesis, and which it is useful to delineate early on. *Imaginary Letters* (1917-18), a fictional set of correspondence sent by William Bland Burn from the revolutionary city of Petrograd in 1917 to his wife, Lydia, in London, display some of the key features of Lewis's intellectual and imaginary treatment of the body, and a brief survey of this text provides a useful introduction to this thesis.

Burn displays some attitudes and characteristics often encountered in Lewis's writing, most notably the conviction of his own superiority to most other people. The first letter contains a long explanation by Burn, in response to a question of Lydia's, as to why he cannot be happy. Burn rephrases her original question – 'Why not be happy?' – in a way which makes clear his conviction of his distinction from and superiority to the mass: 'That is, why not abandon the plane of exasperation and restlessness, and be content with the approximations and self-deceits of the majority?' (*IL*, 3). Here, simple happiness is seen as a quality of the majority and synonymous with unenlightened self-deception and

intellectual fuzziness. In contrast, Burn's unhappiness, his 'exasperation and restlessness', is seen, by him at least, as the inevitable outcome of his intellectual activity and taste for truth. This distinction between the happily unenlightened mass and a few enlightened but discontented individuals is one which appears frequently in Lewis's work. It should not, however, be taken as the only attitude that he held, or even one that he held very securely.

Burn's superior attitude encompasses misogyny as well as snobbery, and throughout *Imaginary Letters* he is condescending, when not simply insulting, to Lydia. For Burn, the intellectual superiority which he believes he possesses is a masculine quality: 'a sense of values', which he claims his wife lacks, is, he says, 'very roughly a masculine corner' (*IL*, 3). His dim view of women is confirmed when he claims that Yorke, their male infant child, 'was older than [Lydia] when he was born' (*IL*, 4). At one point he tells her that: 'You are after all, my dear lady, only a reproductive machine, painted up in order not to be too unappetising. But you are a machine that has two legs which enable you at any time to run away if you feel inclined' (*IL*, 19). This view of women as nothing more than child-producing automata may seem irredeemably misogynist; however, it is worth noting that the woman has legs with which she can 'run away' if she wants to. While this detail may not dispel the general air of misogyny, it does indicate a certain anxiety at its heart: that women are not completely under the control of men, or even their own biological mechanisms. Feminine desire – here, the desire to 'run away' – is seen as disruptive, and even in these two sentences undermines the masculine logic at work: the woman is 'not only' a machine, but also something which may wish to flee. This may seem just like so much quibbling, but in Chapter Three I will show that Lewis's attitudes towards women are not always as simply misogynist as they may appear and reveal intriguing complexities when read carefully, complexities which do not redeem Lewis and recast him as a feminist, but which help understand his thought more fully.

It could be argued that Burn's misogyny is shared by Lewis: none of Lydia's letters is printed, and this possibly could be seen as denying Lydia

a voice of her own. However, we do get a sense of her arguments from Burn's response to them and his occasional quotation of them in his letters, and, as the letters progress, we get a sense of her action as well. Lydia's arguments are not, on the evidence we are given, the passive and weak ones we might expect from Burn's characterisation of her, and at times she expresses ideas remarkably similar to ones expressed by Lewis himself. For example, Burn quotes Lydia as writing of him that:

Being so disgusted with people suggests a naive idealism. We are all ridiculous, looked at properly, by means of our little forked bodies. We are disgusting physically (except a few in their fluffy and velvety youth). So why carp, and glare, and sheer off? Take life, in the English-civilized way, as a joke; our funny bodies and their peculiar needs, our ambitions, greeds, as comic stunts of an evidently gentleman-creator, who is most unquestionably "a sport." (*IL*, 5)

Lydia's position, apart perhaps from its invocation of a squire-like deity, is remarkably similar to ideas proposed by Lewis in later works, most notably in his theories of the comic developed in *The Wild Body* and *Men Without Art*, discussed in Chapter Two. Indeed, Lewis's work in general is haunted, I will argue, by the spectre of a basic physical commonality that reduces all intellectual effort to absurd examples of 'naive idealism'. This is not to say that the supercilious 'disgust' which Lydia complains of in Burn is not also present in Lewis's work, but merely to insist that it always coexists with a more cynical and egalitarian sense of disgust. Lewis's disgust speaks with two conflicting voices: a disgust with others and a disgust with everybody, including the one disgusted. In this thesis, I will contend that when reading Lewis we need to be alert to this other voice, backgrounded though it may be, in order to grasp the fullness and complexity of his work.

Burn responds to Lydia's argument by claiming that 'we are obviously in the position of Ulysses' companions' and that 'there is nothing that [he] resents[s] more than people settling down to become what is sensible for a swine' (*IL*, 5). This idea of animal nature of the human – or more precisely the animalised nature: Ulysses' companions, of course, started off as fully human – is another recurrent feature of Lewis's writing, and the disgust

and dissatisfaction he feels towards it is one of the motors of his imagination. However, Lewis's sense of disgust with this animalisation would not be so great if he did not fear it to be universally true, and Burn's defiance of his own proposition risks coming across as, to use one of Lydia's words, 'ridiculous': 'I will still stalk about with my stumpy legs, and hold my snout high, however absurd it may be' (*IL*, 5). Burn ends the first of his letters with an admission of his own desire for fleshy pleasures, writing that: 'I wish, Lydia, you were here, with your body rasping under mine now. We could beat out this argument to another tune' (*IL*, 6).

Although Burn seems to be a complete snob who believes in his own superiority and detachment, his account of genius is one in which, perhaps surprisingly, the masses play an important, if unconscious, role. For Burn, genius comes from the embodiment of the mass, rather than complete transcendence of it:

All the full and tragic artists partake of the destiny of the popular hero; thousands of people contribute to their success only in this case without meaning to; each man or woman hands in his or her fraction of vitality; wherever they go, there is a great crowd with them. Their brain is a record of their sympathies, people pour in and are piled up, with a persistent classification, until giant-like and permanent images, the "types" of drama or fiction are produced: Raskolnikoffs, Golyadkins and Alioshas. It is the sense of power bestowed by this throng that enables them to create so hotly, and with so unreasonable a faith. (*IL*, 13)

This attribution of the power of 'the full and tragic artists' to the 'throng' may seem to clash with the spirit of Burn's pronouncements, but this cohabitation of a disdain for and a recognition of the power of the crowd is, as we will see in Chapter Five, a feature of Lewis's work.

Burn's recognition of the importance of the crowd for the individual does not extend to a related pair of concepts, mind and body. Burn declares that: 'One truth, however, I have tested enough for it to be no more experimental. [...] The body does not matter the smallest fraction where the mind is concerned' (*IL*, 16). Burn's reasons for belief in this supposedly universal truth seem rooted in his own particular physical

circumstances: he is, by his own admission, a very ugly man, but claims: 'I can imagine beauty as fluently and fully as if I had the head of Apollo' (*IL*, 16). Burn's belief in his ability to transcend his body relies on a belief in the incorporeal soul: 'The twists in a body can only impress themselves on a spirit that dwells constantly therein. Mine comes back to its disgraceful bed, and lies cramped and ill in it' (*IL*, 16).

Although Burn claims to be entirely sure of what he is saying, he can still imagine Lydia's critical response to it. He claims that 'Goethe's god-like person gave him plenty of calm sleep', but is aware that 'If I said *too much* you would sneer and think that the grapes were sour!!' (*IL*, 16). Lydia's attitude is also present in Hanp's claim in *Enemy of the Stars*, examined in Chapter Two, that Arghol's 'philosophy' is 'Sour grapes!' (*ES*, 106). In both cases the voice of a subordinate character interrupts the protagonist's excursion into idealism with a rude reminder of the material conditions in which they find themselves. This undermining of idealism, as well as its initial expression, is an important feature of Lewis's thought, and shows once again the two conflicting voices at work.

As *Imaginary Letters* progresses Burn slowly comes to realise that his wife has been having an affair with a friend of his, who is in fact the father of Lydia's child. *Imaginary Letters* ends with Lydia demanding a divorce and leaving for America, a development which undermines Burn's ostensible detachment and superiority. Lydia also tells Burn that he is not the father of Yorke, an idea that Burn finds impossible to accept. Burn's disbelief is unconvincing as there are several hints in earlier letters that Yorke may not be his child: there are several references to Burn's friend Villerant who is in London with Lydia, and who Burn suspects 'of having smiled at my naiveté' (*IL*, 4). Burn himself ponders the fact that 'Yorke, by a miracle (the miracle of your beauty, I suppose) appears to have escaped the contamination of my flesh', and even asks himself 'perhaps I am not Yorke's father' before reassuring himself 'I am. I should know that tell-tale rump anywhere' (*IL*, 15, 19). In the last letter we learn that Lydia questions Burn's faith in the size of his and his son's rump, asking him 'Cannot you think of *anyone else* with a large bottom?' (*IL*, 25). Burn answers 'I cannot'

and ends his last letter: ‘So I presume you are fooling. I believe you are still in London’ (*IL*, 25). Given the numerous indications of Lydia’s infidelity Burn’s self-confident disbelief seems an absurd response to the reality of the situation. The biological, in the guise of large bottoms, fails to provide Burn with the ground for his belief that he is Yorke’s father: Burn turns to the biological for reassurance of his own position and finds no such thing, yet still stubbornly persists in his now groundless belief of his paternity. This turn to the body to provide a ground for belief, and the subsequent discovery that it delivers something quite different from what it appeared to promise is a recurrent pattern in Lewis’s representations of the body, and one which I will explore further in the chapters that follow.

The final triumph of the biological over masculine intellectualism could be read either as the body’s comic undermining of the absurd aspirations of the mind, or as the mind’s inexorable and tragic defeat by the treacherous flesh. In *Imaginary Letters* the comic reading takes precedence – Burn’s reaction to Lydia’s infidelity in the last letter is so absurd that it is impossible to see him as a tragic hero – but in Lewis’s work in general there is always a tension between these two possibilities. The question of whether the autonomy of the mind from the body, or at least the appearance of its autonomy, is to be cherished or to be mocked is one of the central questions of Lewis’s work.

Imaginary Letters is a good introduction to Lewis’s thinking about the body as it shows its essential ambivalence: he articulates both the idea that the body is insignificant and the idea that it is of fundamental importance. This tension in his thinking will be explored in the chapters that follow, and is closely related to the central question of this thesis, the question of grounding. For Burn, the body is, theoretically at least, not a ground for identity, but when faced with the biological fact of Lydia’s adultery his theoretical position becomes strained and absurd, and he undergoes something like a crisis of identity. It would be unwise to identify Lewis too closely with Burn, but the questions that *Imaginary Letters* raises – of detachment and distinction, of separation and autonomy, of truth and certainty, of the tragic, the comic, and the absurd, of the material

and the ideal – are ones which follow Lewis's representations of the body throughout his career, and are the ones upon which this thesis will attempt to cast some light.

Chapter One: Reality

In Wyndham Lewis's short-story 'A Soldier of Humour' (1927) the narrator, Kerr-Orr, remarks that 'I am disposed to forget that people are real – that they are, that is, not subjective patterns belonging specifically to me'; and admits that his 'joke-life [...] has for its very principle a denial of the accepted actual'.¹ Although the character of Kerr-Orr is not simply Lewis, there is a similar concern with reality in Lewis's writing in general, and the 'denial of the accepted actual' is a central concern of both his theoretical work and his fiction. In this chapter, I will use the work of Slavoj Žižek, in particular his elaboration of Jacques Lacan's notion of 'the Real', to explore and elucidate some of the problems of reality in Lewis's work. I will look in detail at *Time and Western Man* (1927), Lewis's major work of cultural and philosophical criticism, and novels *The Childermass* (1928) and *The Revenge for Love* (1937).

In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002) Slavoj Žižek, following Alain Badiou, claims that 'the key feature of the twentieth century' was 'the "passion for the Real [*la passion du réel*]"', arguing that:

The ultimate and defining moment of the twentieth century was the direct experience of the Real as opposed to everyday social reality – the Real in its extreme violence as the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality.²

¹ Wyndham Lewis, 'A Soldier of Humour', in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. Bernard Lafourcade, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), p. 17.

² Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, (London & New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 5-6; the whole of the first chapter, 'Passions of the Real, Passions of Semblance', is very useful, pp. 5-32.

Such a concern can be seen in much of modernism, from the Imagist imperative for ‘Direct treatment of the “thing”’, to the desire of writers such as Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence to reach the reality overlooked by realist fiction.³ However, the modernist ‘passion for the Real’ is given its clearest expression in Marinetti’s ‘The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism’ (1909):

Let’s break out of the horrible shell of wisdom and throw ourselves like pride-ripened fruit into the wide, contorted mouth of the wind! Let’s give ourselves utterly to the Unknown, not in desperation but only to replenish the deep wells of the Absurd!⁴

In contrast to this enthusiastic plunge into the violent unknown, Wyndham Lewis’s work is motivated by the desire to avoid ‘the Real’. However, Lewis was not an advocate of the unreal but rather of what Žižek would term ‘reality’. Žižek’s distinction between ‘the Real’ and ‘reality’ provides a useful theoretical lens through which Lewis’s work can be looked at again, and I will briefly clarify this distinction before analysing Lewis’s texts.

In Žižek’s work the distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘the Real’ is based on the idea that:

the reality of the social universe [is] an illusion that rests on a certain “repression,” on overlooking the real of our desire. This social reality is then nothing but a fragile, symbolic cobweb than can at any moment be torn aside by an intrusion of the real.⁵

³ F. S. Flint, ‘From *Poetry* March 1913’, in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 129; Virginia Woolf, ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’, first published 1924, in *Collected Essays*, Vol. I, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), pp. 319-37; D. H. Lawrence, Letter to Edward Garnett, 5 June 1914, in *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, 2 Vols., ed. Harry T. Moore, (London, Melbourne, Toronto: Heinemann, 1962), p. 282.

⁴ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, ‘The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism’, first published 1909, trans. R. W. Flint, in *Art In Theory: 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 146.

⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 17.

For Žižek the maintenance of this fragile ‘reality’ involves the establishment of a boundary between it and ‘the Real’: ‘the barrier separating the real from reality is therefore the very condition of “normalcy”: “madness” [...] sets in when this barrier is torn down’.⁶ Žižek argues that this barrier is maintained by fantasy, which, he argues ‘is on the side of reality’, and is essential to its maintenance. He claims that:

when the phantasmic frame disintegrates, the subject undergoes a “loss of reality” and starts to perceive reality as an “irreal” nightmarish universe with no firm ontological foundation; this nightmarish universe is not “pure fantasy” but, on the contrary, *that which remains of reality after reality is deprived of its support in fantasy*.⁷

In Žižek’s eyes ‘the Real’ is associated with the ‘irreal’: when fantasy-sustained ‘reality’ breaks down ‘the Real’ appears in the form of the ‘irreal’. ‘Reality’, however ‘real’ it may appear, is sustained by fantasy, whereas ‘the Real’, fantastic and irreal as it seems, is completely devoid of fantasy. However, it is important to note that ‘the Real’ can never positively appear as ‘the Real’: as that which ‘totally resists symbolization’ it can not be incorporated into our sense of ‘reality’ in any meaningful way. The ‘passion for the Real’ does not ever reach ‘the Real’ but, as Žižek writes, ‘culminates in its apparent opposite [...] in the pure semblance of the spectacular *effect of the Real*’.⁸ However, despite the inherent impossibility of ‘the passion for the Real’ Žižek writes that it should not be rejected as ‘once we adopt this stance, the only remaining attitude is that of refusing to go to the end, of “keeping up appearances”’.⁹

⁶ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 17.

⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, (London & New York: Verso, 1997), p. 66.

⁸ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, pp. 9-10.

⁹ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p. 24.

Time and Western Man:

“reality” [...] is not what it usually represents itself to be’

One of the most interesting aspects of Lewis’s treatment of reality in *Time and Western Man* is his exploration of the role of belief in what we experience as reality. He writes that:

For the understanding of “reality,” and to get at the meaning of the problems suggested by the term “reality,” there is no term so important as “belief.” *Reality* is in fact simply *belief*. What you “believe in” is a thing’s “reality”: that is the realistic, not of course the logical, account of it. That which a thing *ceases* to be for you, when you cease to believe in it, is “real.” And the sensation that we define as “reality” is the thing whose nearest specification is described in the word “belief.” To *believe* in a thing’s *existence* is to experience its *reality*. Reality, then, is simply a way a describing our capacity for belief, and the things in which we believe. (*TWM*, 351)

Lewis’s point here is that the sense of reality depends on belief, and that philosophy which enquires too much into the nature of reality and which suspends the ‘common-sense’ belief in ‘common-sense’ reality in order to make a more truthful account of it, will ultimately lose sight of reality altogether. For Lewis, the existence of a sustainable and operative sense of reality without an accompaniment of belief is an impossibility. Lewis in effect proposes a categorical difference between two types of reality: an apparent and believable reality and a real yet unbelievable reality; in which the former is the world as it appears to us in consciousness, structured and made to appear real by our belief, and the latter the world as it actually is and is registered as sensation. This distinction can be seen to prefigure Žižek’s distinction between ‘the Real’ and ‘reality’, the latter which, sustained as it is by the ‘phantasmic frame’ of ideology, is almost identical to Lewis’s belief-sustained reality. A good illustration of this difference between these two realities is given in an unpublished chapter of *Time and Western Man*, in which Lewis writes:

The single, isolated, direct sensation, however “real” (as we should describe a sensation) in one way and perhaps violent, would not yet bear with it the consciousness of *reality* or of *belief*. Take any sudden, violent sensation. Imagine yourself walking along a platform waiting for a train, and that suddenly a “crashing” aeroplane dropped on top of you. For an instant, before you were killed, you would be aware of the aeroplane. But that instantaneous sensation, without anything preceding it or following it, would lack *reality*. Such an event (for the brief moment of your awareness) would have a dream quality. (*TWM*, 549)

The assertion that we cannot comprehend a real event as part of reality unless we can relate it to what precedes and follows it suggests that, for Lewis, the sense of reality is in some way narrative, that, perhaps surprisingly for the great enemy of ‘Time-philosophy’, events which cannot be fitted into some temporal order – the instantaneous and unanticipated violence of an aeroplane falling on one’s head – are perceived as unreal and phantasmagoric. Reality for Lewis is not simply sensation, but the consciousness of sensation that has been structured and ordered by belief, a point he makes quite clearly, writing that ‘A purely sensational existence would not be capable of supplying this notion, “reality,” at all’ (*TWM*, 355). This means that, as Lewis writes, “reality” as a notion, and in its generally accepted sense, is not what it usually represents itself to be’ but rather is something which requires a minimal degree of mediation to become operative:

We need *time to think*, in short, and the leisure which habit supplies us with, to arrive at the notion of the “real”; we require the sort of loose, disconnected “self” of our non-sensational, abstract life to get this sensation with. The purely sensational creature (like the newly-born baby) would not discriminate between itself and the exterior world. It would *be* what happened to it. It would *be* everything with which its senses presented itself. There would be no question of a “self.” There would only be a not-self of pure sensation – which is, of course, the evangelical christian and communistic “self,” as it is also the self of “action” and “function”: the time-self. (*TWM*, 355)

Lewis’s rejection of pure sensation, of the unmediated experience, is one which sets him apart from much of modernist thinking, and its insistence

on maintaining an operative sense of self is dependent also on retaining shared social values. For Lewis, the maintenance of 'reality' in the face of 'the Real' was a task that could not be taken on successfully by the isolated individual, but could be achieved by preserving a stable social order. Just as for Lewis the real in which we cannot believe (the crashing aeroplane) is perceived as having a 'dream-quality' and lacking reality, for Žižek 'the Real' perceived without a 'phantasmic frame' also lacks reality and is perceived as 'an "irreal" nightmarish universe'. This similarity is interesting and significant because it indicates that to some extent, and without the benefit of hindsight and the sophisticated conceptual apparatus of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lewis had already identified and begun to critique something like the twentieth century's 'passion for the real' in the 1920s.¹⁰

Lewis's insistence on the importance of belief for our understanding of reality is directed against, among others, thinkers who thought they could obtain a more direct experience of God, an attack which may seem a little paradoxical. Here, to put it in Žižek's terms, Lewis sets the 'reality' of belief against 'the Real' of God, in an attack on the theology of William James and others that holds up, perhaps in 'bad faith', Catholic orthodoxy as being the means by which God can be avoided and belief sustained. Lewis makes the seemingly bizarre comment that 'it would not be paradoxical to say that the catholic position [...] is that of the *irreligious*, or *non-religious* mind, in contrast to the God-hungry mysticism of the James type' (*TWM*, 364).

Lewis's theology may seem a little eccentric, but it continues and develops the anti-transcendent aspect of his thinking, that can be first seen in his rejection of total abstraction in visual art before the First World War, to include both a rejection of the idea of complete corporeal immanence as

¹⁰ Lewis's 'purely sensational creature' unable to 'discriminate between itself and the exterior world' is reminiscent of Lacan's notion of the pre-mirror-stage human subject who cannot distinguish 'between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*'. Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytical Experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London & New York: Routledge, 2001). p. 4.

well as that of absolute spiritual transcendence. Lewis writes of ‘a swarm of philosophers more or less inspired by James’, who believe, as he sees it, that:

the way to attain God is the *direct* one of personal “religious experience” possessed of “a certitude stronger than that attaching to religious truth.” It is the manner of the protestant Reformation, of course, the direct plunge to God, not only without mediation or by means of reason (with all the dangers of that confusing exercise), but with a debased reliance upon some kind of semi-philosophical, half-rational image: for clearly no plunge of that sort is entirely “direct,” unless a great heat of mystical emotion is called into play, which is not usual with philosophers. (*TWM*, 365)

Lewis makes it clear that he sees a deep connection between the ‘God-hungry mysticism of the James type’ and the Reformation and the emergence of Protestantism, a point that is also made in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), where he writes that:

When Luther appealed for the individual soul direct to God, and the power of mediating authority was definitively broken, God must have foreseen that he would soon follow His viceregents. The individual soul would later on, had he been God, have known very well that when he abandoned God, he would before long himself be abandoned. The mediator should have known that too. In any case this necessary triad had vanished. The trinity of God, Subject, and Object is at an end. The collapse of this trinity is the history also of the evolution of the subject into the object or of the child back into the womb from which it came. (*ABR*, 27)

In the face of this perceived breakdown of ‘mediating authority’ and the accompanying regression, Lewis preferred a more traditional and less zealous approach:

How much cleaner, and in the end more efficacious, is the method of the catholic, the inventions of Reason rather than the irresponsible and lonely gushings of “intuitive” heat. About the wish to seize and mingle with the supreme Reality in a passionate attack there is something lunatic and egoistic. To maintain this supreme divinity in isolation from our imperfection, instead of exacting jealously its

democratic descent to where we are, to approach it only circuitously and with a measured step, at the risk of appearing unfervid is, it would seem, to the human reason and to human taste, the better way. (TWM, 365)

This emphasis on the ‘lunatic and egoistic’ nature of the desire to ‘seize and mingle with the supreme Reality’ is indicative of Lewis’s rejection of ‘the passion of the Real’, and, moreover, is in keeping with his more explicitly political wish to maintain an ordered, delineated, and hierarchical social structure, as his reference to the ‘democratic descent’ of God makes clear. What also becomes obvious is that this unease with ‘mingling’ is expressed in terms of what Lewis would see as degraded physicality. Lewis considers James’s use of a ‘bar of iron’ under the influence of magnetism, which of course it cannot express but nevertheless affects it,¹¹ as a metaphor for the ‘faith-state’, as meaning that to reach such a state ‘we have to “primitivize” ourselves to the extent of reaching the mineral world – we do not even stop at the animal’ (TWM, 367). Lewis objects to this downgrading of the human to the mineral, and also to what he sees as the sexual nature of a ‘faith-state’ so achieved:

The “cheerful and expansive” disturbances [James] elsewhere indicates give us a further enlightenment as to what would no doubt be the ultimate seat of such experiences, of the “bar-of-iron” order: for the “expansive and searching” movements of sex [...] indicate where we should get to in our intimate and personal attack upon Deity. It would be very much *sans façon*, in the end, that we should “experience” our God. In James’ highly stimulated bar-of-iron we have the link between his later mystical philosophy and the sexual character of most mystical religiosity. (TWM, 368)

¹¹ ‘It is as if a bar of iron, without touch or sight, with no representative facility whatever, might nevertheless be strongly endowed with an inner capacity for magnetic feeling; and as if, through the various arousals of its magnetism by magnets coming and going in its neighbourhood, it might be consciously determined to different attitudes and tendencies. Such a bar of iron could never give you an outward description of the agencies that had the power of stirring it so strongly; yet of their presence, and of their significance for its life, it would be intensely aware through every fibre of its being.’ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, first published 1902, (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 55-6; quoted in TWM, pp. 376-8.

Lewis writes that in ‘the impulsive, tail-wagging, sentimental dog [...] we certainly have a *religious animal*’, and that ‘the dog’s worship of his master [is a] “religion” of a more absolute order than any of which man is capable’ (*TWM*, 368). The characterisation of the ‘absolute’ as non-human is a fundamental feature of Lewis’s thought, from his rejection of total abstraction in art to his hostility to complete immediacy of experience. The ‘absolute’ for Lewis is very much something that has to be kept at the correct and proper distance, and is seen as having lethal effects if the boundary between it and the human is broken down. Lewis maintains that there is, or, rather, that there was and still should be, a decisive distinction between the ‘supreme Reality’ of the absolute or God, and the ‘personal reality’ of the human individual. Indeed, he writes that ‘our sense of personal reality is so great that we are not able, at the same time, to entertain the *sensation* of the existence of a God’ (*TWM*, 373); a statement which could be rewritten in the language of Žižek to mean that ‘reality’ cannot be sustained in the face of direct contact with ‘the Real’. Lewis writes that he is ‘against a mystical “belief,” [...] though not against the rational belief’, and that he considers such ‘mystical’ belief, in the manner of James, as ‘incompatible with “belief” in the more universal sense of experiencing and holding in ourself the sensation of reality’ (*TWM*, 373). This incommensurability of belief in ourselves and belief in the absolute, means, for Lewis, that our relation to ‘the supreme Reality’ must remain an oblique and indirect one. Indeed, he writes that: ‘It is as thieves only – a thief of the real – that we can exist, or as parasites upon God. The Absolute, we think, crushes, and is meant by its hierophants to crush, the personal life’ (*TWM*, 373).

Lewis’s preference for ‘reality’ over ‘the Real’ is given its most programmatic expression in the following passage, in which he makes a case for a focus on the superficial and the avoidance of the more fundamental:

If the contrast is between a conception of the world as an ultimate Unity on the one hand, or a Plurality on the other; if you have,

dogmatic and clear-cut, or rather if you could have, on the one side a picture of a multiplicity of wave-like surface changes only, while all the time the deep bed of Oneness reposes unbroken underneath: on the other side the idea of an *absolute* plurality, every midget existence, every speck and grain, unique (for what such “uniqueness” was worth) and equally *real*, irrespective of any hierarchy of truth at all: then can there be any question that the hypothesis of Oneness is the profounder hypothesis, and must, if we lay this barely between those two, be the real? But we are surface-creatures only, and by nature are meant to be that only, if there is any meaning in nature. No metaphysician goes the whole length of departure from the surface-condition of mind – that fact is generally not noticed. For such departures result in self-destruction, just as though we hurled ourselves into space – into “mental-space,” if you like, in this case. We are surface-creatures, and the “truths” from beneath the surface contradict our values. It is among the flowers and leaves that our lot is cast, and the roots, however “interesting,” are not so ultimate for us. For us the ultimate thing is the surface, the last-comer, and that is committed to a plurality of being. (*TWM*, 377)

Lewis restricts knowledge to the surface not because he considers ‘the “truths” from beneath the surface’ as categorically unknowable, but because they ‘contradict our values’ and potentially result in ‘self-destruction’. His epistemology is framed in terms of survival rather than knowability; going ‘beneath the surface’ is not rejected because it is impossible, but because it is dangerous. A wilful ignorance of ‘the Real’ is central to Lewis’s version of ‘reality’, a pattern that is repeated in his approach to God:

If there is a God, we can say, we have, for this life, our backs turned to each other. This must be so for things to be bearable at all for us as creatures: for such unrelieved intimacy as would otherwise exist, such perpetual society – of such a pervasive, psychic, overwhelming kind – would not be socially possible. We at least must *pretend* not to notice each other’s presence, [...]. To confront or “encounter” God is for us physically impossible, we can conclude; *we can only see God, if at all, from behind.* (*TWM*, 372)

The fundamental problem with Lewis’s survival-oriented epistemology of the surface is that it assumes that it is within the power of individuals to ignore the absolute, whether in the form of God or ‘the Real’, and does not

consider situations where this strategy would become impossible, and the 'unrelieved intimacy' of 'perpetual society' become unavoidable. It is in the light of this lack in his philosophy that the treatment of 'reality' and 'the Real' in his novels becomes significant, for they deal with situations in which individuals do not possess sufficient power to turn their backs to 'the Real' of the situations in which they find themselves, and where the 'reality' of the surface starts to crack and disintegrate.

The Childermass:

‘the whole appearance vanishes, the man is gone’

The work of Lewis’s in which a sense of reality is most dramatically lost is his 1928 novel *The Childermass*, described by Fredric Jameson as a work of ‘theological science fiction’.¹² *The Childermass* is so full of episodes where the real and the unreal mix uneasily that it would be impossible to document and analyse them all, and so I will concentrate, to begin with, on the figures of the ‘peons’, the ghostly proletariat of Lewis’s imagined after-world, whose tendency to disintegrate when looked at too hard demonstrates extremely well the bizarre nature of the reality of *The Childermass*, and indicates some of the more general cultural and political concerns of the novel. The peons first appear early on in the novel, when Pullman and Satterthwaite, the protagonists of the novel, encounter a ‘working-party of the peons despatched at daybreak from the celestial port for field-work and employment in the camp’ (C, 21). The peons are described in terms which immediately give an impression of their status both as labourers and tenuously real indigents:

Grey-faced, a cracked parchment with beards of a like material, ragged wisps and lamellations of the skin, bandage-like turbans of the same shade, or long-peaked caps, their eyes are blank, like discoloured stones. A number of figures are collected with picks and shovels, baulks, a wheelbarrow in the shape of a steep trough, a gleaming sickle, two long-handled sledges and one heavy beetle-hammer. Their spindle limbs are in worn braided dungaree suitings. (C, 21)

The peons fascinate Satters, who is new to the after-world and unlike Pullman has not seen them before:

Satters’ eyes are attracted to these halted human shells as though to a suddenly perceived vacuum but with them it is not the abstract abyss. The bold spanking rhythm of Satters’ forward roll degenerates into

¹² Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979), p. 6.

sluggish pretence, stimulated by his trainer. His vertigo increases as they draw near to the peons. Pullman idles coolly forward, blandly receptive in his Zoo of men, but he says, "Don't look!" frequently, mistrusting of the mysterious inflammability of all more instinctive organisms. (C, 23)

It is significant that it is specifically only Satters' eyes that are attracted to the peons, as this purely ocular fascination appears as more a physical than a mental process, guided by the automatism of one of the senses rather than the reflection and will of the mind or personality. The physical nature of Satters' fascination is also manifested in the 'degeneration' of his walk from 'bold spanking rhythm [...] into sluggish pretence', as if the mere sighting of the peons instantly affects Satters' bodily posture which, until now, has been characterised as one of a thoroughly upper-class and public-school clumsiness, but which seems very quickly to begin to approximate that of the peons. When Pullman commands Satters not to look at the peons, it is unclear whether his mistrust of 'the mysterious inflammability of all more instinctive organisms' is focused on Satters or on the peons, an ambiguity which also gives an indication of the sudden and involuntary similarity that is at work.

Things get even more peculiar when we are given a Satters-eye view of the proceedings:

Satters in the dirty mirror of the fog sees a hundred images, in the aggregate, sometimes as few as twenty, it depends if his gaze is steadfast. Here and there their surfaces collapse altogether as his eyes fall upon them, the whole appearance vanishes, the man is gone. But as the pressure withdraws of the full-blown human glance the shadow reassembles, in the same stark posture, every way as before, at the same spot – obliquely he is able to observe it coming back jerkily into position. (C, 23)

The peons cannot be fixed in vision, and although they disappear to some extent they never do so completely, always remaining obliquely in the field of vision. If we take the peons to represent the urban working-class masses characteristic of modernity, something suggested by the fact that they

come equipped with ‘a gleaming sickle [...] and one heavy beetle-hammer’ (C, 21), then Lewis’s presentation of them reveals not only an anxiety about the presence and potential power of these masses, but also a concern about the possibility of gaining knowledge of them and fixing them in perception. Rather like the absent crowd of the General Strike that is there but never quite appears in the last chapter of *The Apes of God*, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, the peons can never be confronted directly, as they do not stand still or even remain substantial for long enough for the middle-class observer to be able to come to terms with them and establish what they really are. In both novels the observer who confronts this problem is portrayed as being childlike and naïve – Daniel Boleyn in *The Apes of God* is hardly more developed than the babyish Satters – which may suggest that Lewis is satirising a particular subset of the middle-classes; but, given the more general concern about stability and clarity of vision in his work, it seems extremely likely that this concern about the shifting and indefinable presence of a working-class mass is a fundamental one. The childishness of Satters and Boleyn can then be seen as functioning as a decoy or a screen, enabling Lewis to articulate his anxieties, without suffering the indignity of having to express them directly as his own personal fears.

The peons, and indeed the whole of the world of *The Childermass*, can be seen as a fine example of a world in which ‘all that is sold melts into air’,¹³ and this melting certainly threatens Satters, undermining as it does his confidence in his power to understand the world around him:

The effort to understand is thrown upon the large blue circular eyes entirely: but the blue disc is a simple register; it has been filled with a family of pain-photisms, a hundred odd, it is a nest of vipers absolutely – oh, they are unreal! what are these objects they have got in? signal the muscles of the helpless eye: it distends in alarm; it is

¹³ The phrase is of course from *The Communist Manifesto*, but it also forms the basis and the title of Marshall Berman’s influential account of modernity, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (London & New York: Verso, 1983), which is illuminating on some of the issues at work here.

nothing but a shocked astonished apparatus, asking itself if it has begun to work improperly. (C, 24)

However, when the peons return to some sort of solidity, Satters is not relieved but becomes subject to a new sort of anxiety:

The images take on for him abruptly a menacing distinctness; the monotonous breathing of the group turns into a heave that with a person would be a sigh; all this collection are inflated with a breath of unexpected sadness; a darker shade rushes into the pigments, as it were, of them, like wind springing up in their immaterial passionless trances, whistling upon their lips, at some order, denying them more repose – since they have a life after their fashion, however faded; and a thrill of dismay responds in Satters, the spell lifts, he presses against Pullman, forcing him off the track in panic. (C, 24-5)

That this realisation of the strange reality of the peons results in Satters forcing Pullman (whose name itself suggests a railway carriage) off the track is significant, for it suggests that Satters' perception of the peons, which is far less mediated than Pullman's by the reassurances of the Bailiff, is in some way disruptive of the path which they are supposed to follow. Indeed, Pullman's reaction to Satters' behaviour is exactly that of the haughty but threatened member of the ruling classes: "We must hold our ground [...] Don't show you're afraid of them whatever you do. Where are your fighting glands? They're quite inoffensive" (C, 25). Pullman's reaction is 'to keep up appearances', which is, as we have already seen, Žižek's characterisation of an inadequate reaction to 'the passion for the Real'; rather than admit and take into consideration the reality of what Satters sees, Pullman keeps on repeating the same old clichéd formulas in order to sustain his less traumatic, but less real, sense of reality and order.

Later on Satters and Pullman encounter some friends of Satters, who, like him, are dressed as school-boys, and with whom Satters converses. After they have gone Pullman admonishes Satters for talking to them, as he claims that they were in fact peons, a fact that Satters disputes, and which leads him to ask Pullman:

“What is a peon then, really?”

The response commences at once.

“It is the multitude of personalities which God has created, ever since the beginning of time, and is unable now to destroy,” Pullman mumbles under protest, saying his lesson, over his basket, in which he stirs about with his finger.

“How about Marcus then?”

“Well *how* about him?”

“Well, did I imagine Marcus – you know what I mean, or don’t you? – I’m afraid!”

“Did *you* create Marcus, do you mean?” Pullman’s voice improves and grows distinct, but his head is sunk. He talks to his eggs as he turns them over.

“Oh all right don’t beastly well talk if you don’t want to! No I don’t mean that, that I – what did you say?”

“Why not? In your dreams you create all sorts of people. Why not in the other thing?”

“Why not in the what?”

“Why, in the other dream.” (C, 41-2)

Pullman’s initial answer, which merely repeats a formula he has learnt from the Bailiff and which until now has been accepted by Satters, does not end the questioning here, and Pullman himself raises the possibility of subjectively creating people by the power of the imagination ‘in the other dream’, i.e. in the ‘normal’ waking world of *The Childermass*. This possibility, which in the world they are in cannot be summarily dismissed, seems to have a devastating physical effect on Pullman:

Pullman looks up. Satters gazes into a sallow vacant mask, on which lines of sour malice are disappearing, till it is blank and elementary, in fact the face of a clay doll.

“Why, you are a peon!” Satters cries pointedly, clapping his hands.

Pullman recovers at his cry, and his face, with muscular initiative, shrinks as though in the grip of a colossal sneeze. The screwed-up cuticle is a pinched blister of a head-piece: it unclenches, and the normal Pullman-mask emerges, but still sallow, battered and stiff-lipped. (C, 42)

This slippage on Pullman’s part, who until now has very much functioned as Satters’ only stable and reliable point of reference, prompts Satters to question him even more:

“Then I could create you as well, couldn’t I?” [Satters] drawls, and yawns.

“I expect so.”

Pullman squints at him with vixenish reserve and yawns.

“Are peons— What was I going to say? Are the peons – ”

“Men?”

“No not men; I mean are they always peons?”

Pullman is in a huff; he moves the previous question. The dialogue prevents him from leaving.

“They are not *always* peons.”

“*Always* is a big order. Once a peon, always a peon: is that what you mean? Not necessarily.”

“Yes I expect sometimes – They are human like us, aren’t they, in a way, Pulley?”

“Not like us.”

“Not like us? What is the difference? Are we very different? I believe we only think we’re different.” (C, 43)

Satters seems to have hit on one of the truths of the world of *The Childermass*: the difference between the non-peons and the peons is not an absolute or an innate one, but one which has to be sustained through the reiteration of conventions and formulaic statements of belief. This ‘realisation’ by Satters (although the reader is probably meant to be more aware of its truth than Satters, who remains the quintessential nincompoop) immediately has dramatic effects on the simulacrum of a souk in which this exchange has taken place:

the lambent grain of the wall falls into violent movement, then it collapses, a white triturated dust puffs into the bazaar. Satters plunges into the dissolving surface after the small darting figure with the basket. He closes his eyes, there is a soft rush in his ears, there is an empty instant of time, and he is hurled from the sinking fabric.

For a few seconds he is confused. He is still aware, as an image, of the scene from which he has been expelled. But the river is there in front of him: the city is reflected in it, as it is near. Pullman tramples beside him, bareheaded, in his slippers. The strangeness of the abrupt readjustment is overcome almost immediately. Then at once the present drives out everything except itself, so that inside a minute it for him is the real. (C, 43-4)

This sudden expulsion and the quickness with which the change of scene is internally recognised and accepted as reality dramatises the extent of the power of the Bailiff (who presumably is responsible for it, but who has not yet appeared in the narrative except through Pullman's routine allusions to him) over both the external environment and Pullman and Satters' perception of it. The speed at which the transformation becomes accepted is due to the shortness of their memory – an image of where they were before is retained, but only briefly, and 'the present drives out everything except itself', that is to say the previous environment and their memory of it.

Immediately after this unanticipated change of scene, as Pullman and Satters set off again, a 'strange voice rises upon the atmosphere, in apostrophe', and, as Satters immediately realises, 'The words are Pullman's but the voice and the manner are those of a stranger' (C, 44). This dissociation of Pullman's words and his voice signals the breakdown of the natural unity of the subject, manifested by the fact that Pullman is not entirely in control of himself, and indicates the presence of something other than Pullman and Satters, even though they are apparently alone – something other which can evidently speak through Pullman if it wishes to do so. Satters himself finds this 'lapse' of Pullman's amusing, and 'eyes with mischievous satisfaction the unconscious figure'; Pullman, on the other hand finds it an uncomfortable and embarrassing experience:

Frowning, [Pullman] eructates slightly twice, then again, expelling the sensation – planting his slippered feet, as he advances, with additional firmness. He whistles a few bars of a chimes. As a person guilty of a spasm of wind in a select company, but who covers the breach with a stolid eye, so Pullman disregards his lapse from the rational. (C, 44)

The simile of the 'spasm of wind' and Pullman's eructation (belching) suggests a grotesquely physical dimension to his reaction to the dissociation which he has unconsciously undergone; his attempt to expel the sensation through such inside-out methods suggests that, in Pullman's

mind, the power or presence which was responsible for the lapse imposes itself inside him, rather than upon him. Pullman's defensive belching also recalls one of his instructions to Satters, after their earlier encounter with peons, to "Spit out that filth!", which was swiftly followed by the peons becoming 'a part of the sodden unsteady phantasm of the past upon the spot' (C, 28). In both episodes the motion of physical expulsion of something interior (liquid or gas) functions as a means of the individual removing the influence of an external force that has somehow become internalised. Or, perhaps more accurately, it allows the individual to believe that they have accomplished such an expulsion. This image of the influence of others manifesting itself as a physical intrusion or as the digestion of an alien element, suggests that, for Pullman at least, the expulsion of this element will also result in the expulsion of the influence: he thinks that he can belch out the other voice which speaks through him. Such a belief presupposes that the physically intact individual is autonomous, and that individuality can be regulated and guaranteed through the maintenance of the proper order and appearance of the body.

The relationship between belief and reality, so important in *Time and Western Man*, features in the explanation Pullman gives Satters for the latter's feelings of strangeness: Pullman relates an anecdote about a Professor Tyndall who, when receiving an electric shock in a public demonstration involving a battery of Leyden jars, has the following experience:

" [...] For a few moments Professor Tyndall was insensible. [...] Well, when Professor Tyndall came to, he found himself in the presence of his audience. There was he, there was the audience, there were the Leyden jars. In a flash he realized perfectly what had happened: he knew he had received the battery discharge. The intellectual consciousness, as he called it, of his position returned more promptly than the optical consciousness. What is meant by that is as follows. He recovered himself, so to speak, very nearly at once. He was conscious on the spot of what had occurred. Professor Tyndall had great presence of mind. He was able to address the audience and reassure it immediately. But *while he was reassuring* the audience, his body appeared to him cut up into fragments. For instance, his arms were separated from his trunk, and seemed suspended in the

air. He was able to reason and also to speak as though nothing were the matter. But his optic nerve was quite irrational. It reported everything in a fantastic manner. Had he believed what it reported, he would not have been able to address his audience as he did, or in fact address them at all. Do you follow so far? Had it been the optic nerve speaking it would have said, 'As you see, I am all in pieces!' As it was, he said, 'You see! I am uninjured and quite as usual.' [...] " (C, 89-90)

Pullman goes on to explain that when he first arrived in the world of *The Childermass* this story came to his mind:

" [...] Shall I tell you my reasoning? [...] Tyndall when he was addressing the audience was really disembodied. He had no body at the moment, only bits. He spoke from memory of the normal situation. Do you see the train of thought or not? On the physical side we are, at present, memories of ourselves. Do you get that? We are in fragments, as it were, or anything you like. We are not normal, are we? No. Conscious – we are conscious, though. So there you have a sufficient parallel. We behave as we do *from memory*, that's the idea. We go one better than Tyndall: we put the thing together in its sensational completeness. We behave as though we were now what we used to be, in life. [...] " (C, 90-1)

These images of fragmentation and reintegration dramatise the idea that the body does not, at least in the world of *The Childermass*, exist for consciousness in a self-evident and unmediated way. However, there is a crucial difference between the experience of Satters and that of Professor Tyndall in Pullman's anecdote: for Tyndall, his body really is unified and whole, and the shock that he experiences exposes him briefly to the perception that his body exists as fragments, an illusory perception which, through the operation of his intellect, he quickly overcomes; with Satters, on the other hand, his body is not really unified in the first place – 'We are not normal, are we?' – and the mental operation of unification is one which has to be performed and cannot just be assumed. Pullman's statement that 'We behave as though we were now what we used to be, in life', suggests that the unification of the perceived fragments of the body through the action of memory is no longer a temporary defence against a

momentary illusion of fragmentation, as it was with Professor Tyndall, but an ongoing constitutive process, an ongoing means by which people can behave 'as though' they were normal. For Tyndall, the knowledge of his bodily unity is realistic, it is in accordance with the reality of the situation, as the fragmentation he perceives is just an effect of his electrocution, whereas for Satters and Pullman, the belief that their bodies are unified, based on their memories, is not realistic in the sense of simply reflecting a fixed objective reality out there, but is an active process of reality-production, of enabling them to behave 'as though' they were still 'normal'.

The split between an 'intellectual consciousness' and an 'optical consciousness' that Pullman invokes in his explanation of Professor Tyndall's experience is a useful one for understanding the relationship between Pullman and Satters. Throughout the novel attention is drawn to the eyes of the two main characters: Pullman is presented as having glasses and poor vision, one of the key characteristics he shares with James Joyce; Satters is introduced as having 'blue eyes engagingly dilated' (C, 7), and when he has to answer a question about the size of his eyes for a questionnaire of the Bailiff's Pullman prompts him to answer, '*large. Very big. Lovely big ones! And blue*' (C, 66). As we saw when Satters first encountered the Peons, his eyes sometimes seem to possess a will of their own, becoming drawn to things without the intervention of his mind; on the other hand, Pullman tends not to see what he does not already believe in, and in contrast to Satters, his optical perceptions are completely under the control of his intellect, something illustrated by his attitude towards their surroundings:

[Satters:] "What are those hills?"

"Hills? Where? There are no hills. They're nothing!" Pullman crossly exclaims.

"I didn't know."

"Nothing at all, not hills."

The distance to the city varies; Satters repeatedly looks over, lunging his head to catch it at its changes and at last says:

"Doesn't that look smaller sometimes?"

"What?" Pullman looks round indignantly.

"Sometimes it looks smaller to me than others."

“Certainly not! Whatever makes you think!”

The whole city like a film-scene slides away perceptibly several inches to the rear, as their eyes are fixed upon it.

“There!” exclaims Satters pointing.

“Oh that! I know, it looks like it. But it isn’t so. It’s only the atmosphere.” (C, 32)

Pullman’s stubborn insistence that firstly there are no hills when hills can clearly be seen, and secondly that they are stationary when in fact they are clearly moving, indicates the extent to which his optical perception of his environment is conditioned by his belief that it is normal, and is not the bizarre and shifting oddity that it really is, and which he and Satters both see. The irony of Pullman’s insistence that the hills are not really moving but only look as if they are is revealed later when the Bailiff declares “The mountains were an idea of mine!” (C, 210), and explains that:

I had [the mountains] fixed up as I told you. It was no easy matter to get ’em to make their appearance as you now can see them and settle down in the reliable way they have as pukka mountains, as they are. I went into the whole matter with our principal engineer as it happens a Scot – a Scot – a very able person: he was despatched to Iceland and he brought back the mountains with him or should I say their appearance. Once in a way they vanish even now, but they’re a fairly dependable landmark on the whole as certain as most things. Don’t look too hard at them, I didn’t say they were to be taken too seriously. (C, 224)

The fact that the mountains really are only ‘their appearance’ makes a mockery of Pullman’s earlier position, and shows that the ‘optical consciousness’ of Satters actually registers the reality of their situation better than his ‘intellectual consciousness’, reversing the hierarchy he invoked in the anecdote of Professor Tyndall. But although Satters can in many ways see, or allow himself to see, the reality of the world they are in, he is not equipped with the knowledge to survive in it unaided by Pullman, a fact emphasised by the constant references to his childishness and Pullman’s nannyishness. Lewis’s point here is not that the optical consciousness is superior to the intellectual consciousness, or vice versa,

but that the separation of these two consciousnesses has deleterious effects on the adequate perception of the world, a point that echoes his assertion in *Time and Western Man* that, '*it is because of the subjective disunity due to the separation, or separate treatment, of the senses, principally of sight and of touch, that the external disunity has been achieved*' (TWM, 393).

The difference between Satters' dangerous optical fascination with the reality of what he sees, and Pullman's defensive intellectual integration of it into a pre-existing pattern is made clear in an earlier passage, where Pullman and Satters are characterised as rats:

A veteran rat trotting in an aerial gutter, he catches a glimpse of glittering chasms but averts his eyes, his present business the periplus of the roof. He is guiding, dutiful senior, the young rat to their eyrie their coign of vantage. Once they get there he will rest, and have a dream perhaps, of gigantic apparitions inhabiting the dangerous hollows inside the world. Meanwhile action is everything; to keep moving is the idea, that is his law of existence – to rattle along these beaten tracks. Has he not the golden secret, who knows as he does the right road to the proper place in record time, barring accidents? But the glamour of this outcast plan, rigid and forbidden, whose lines are marked out through the solid walls of matter, contrary to the purposes of nature, is lost on the newcomer. He only has eyes for the abyss. Intoxicated with the spaces plunging all round them, in passionate distances expressed as bright dizzy drops, let in at spy-holes or thrown up as reflections, he walks upon air, truant in mind from the too-concrete circuit. (C, 16-7)

The abyss which fascinates and intoxicates Satters is real but, in Pullman's eyes, dangerous, and so he averts his eyes from it, resisting the intoxication to which Satters is compelled. On the other hand, Pullman is throughout the book characterised as being 'hypnotised' by the Bailiff; indeed the first time the Bailiff is mentioned he 'withdraws into a hypnotic fixity of expression': 'Pullman stands fast, shoulders high and squared, small calves in inflexible arcs, eyes still hypnotic' (C, 9-10).

It is Satters, the infantile idiot, and not Pullman, the educated intellectual, who directs his gaze beneath the surface, and while Lewis can hardly be said to endorse Satters as an exemplar, Pullman's strategy is

hardly presented as a perfect one, either. However, the alternatives presented here – either following the preordained path of convention or falling into the void – seem to map the only alternatives present in Lewis's thought. The idea of an active engagement with 'the Real' beyond the 'reality' sustained by belief is never seriously considered by Lewis, and the presence of any such reality is caricatured as traumatic and violent, invading the body and the mind of the individual, and destroying their sense of self. It is Lewis's inability to imagine a new way of being that escapes these two limiting alternatives that is his key failure, and marks him out as a peculiar modernist, advocating a reliance on established values and conventions of 'common-sense' together with a suspension of curiosity about 'the Real' on the philosophical level, while practising an extremely original and modern literary and visual style, which breaks decisively with the conventions of naturalistic realism that would seem to be the aesthetic counterpart of his epistemological position.

The idea that memory plays a crucial role in our perception of the world was discussed in *Time and Western Man*, where Lewis asserts that: 'It is memory that gives that depth and fullness to our present, and makes our abstract, ideal world of objects for us' (*TWM*, 383). Contrasted with the depth and fullness of a world mediated and enriched by memory is the flatness and depthlessness of the world as seen by Time-philosophy and modern science, which Lewis sees as:

a world according to the crude or elementary optic sense, and therefore *a picture*. But it is a flat world: it is one of successive, flat, images or impressions. And further, these images or impressions are, as far as possible, naked and simple, direct, sensations, unassociated with any component of memory. (*TWM*, 384)

This would also be a good description of the world of *The Childermass*, particularly in those moments when, as in the disintegration of the simulacral souk, it is at its most arbitrary and fluctuating. In light of this similarity it is significant that Lewis does not see this flat, optical world as

ultimately less real than the world of memory and common-sense, indeed, he actually sees it as more real:

The intensity, nakedness, *reality* of the immediate sensation, even though it gives you no ideal *whole*, though it is dogmatically a creature of the moment, even though it gives you the “objects” of life only as strictly experienced *in Time*; evanescent, flashing and momentary; not even existing outside of their proper time, ideally having no prolongations in memory, confined to the “continuous present” of the temporal appearance: consumed (and immediately evacuated) as “events”: one with *action*, incompatible with reflection, impossible of contemplation – the *sensation* (in spite of these peculiarities) is nevertheless, is it not? *the real thing*. (*TWM*, 389)

This reinforces the idea that it is Satters who perceives far more acutely ‘the Real’ of the world of *The Childermass*, whereas Pullman is stuck in the belief-mediated ‘reality’ controlled by the Bailiff. However, Satters’ helplessness, caused by the lack of an intellectual consciousness, suggests that, by itself, a perception of ‘the Real’ is useless, and that its mediation into ‘reality’ is necessary for an operative knowledge of it to be achieved. Lewis’s satirical attitude towards Pullman’s strategy is interesting, as it is not so different from Lewis’s own epistemology of survival in *Time and Western Man*, where, as we have already seen, he asserted that ‘we are surface-creatures only, and by nature are meant to be that only, if there is any meaning in nature. [...] For us the ultimate thing is the surface, the last-comer, and that is committed to a plurality of being’ (*TWM*, 377). The problem confronted by Pullman is that the surfaces he perceives are not just simply there, they do not exist in a state of stable, common-sense, objective reality, but have been engineered by the Bailiff and can be manipulated for his political benefit. Superficial ‘reality’ ungrounded in ‘the Real’ becomes, in theory at least, merely a matter of belief, and as such is susceptible to ideological manipulation. The inescapability of ‘the Real’, however, manifests itself through Satters’ intransigent reliance on the evidence of his eyes, and even though it never appears as such, its effects disrupt Pullman’s fantasy of a ‘reality’ entirely out of touch with ‘the Real’.

The Revenge for Love:

‘a showdown, between a shadow and a man of flesh and blood’

In *The Revenge for Love* we are presented with a struggle in which the contended factor is not ethical superiority or practical success, but reality: as Margot thinks to herself, ‘it was just as if they had engaged in a battle of wills, to decide who should possess most *reality* – just as men fought each other for money, or fought each other for food’ (*RL*, 163).¹⁴ The antagonistic parties invoked by Margot are, on the one hand, herself and Victor Stamp, her husband, and, on the other, people who could be described, extending the language of *Tarr*, as bourgeois-bohemian-bolsheviks – a set of well-to-do left-wing London intellectuals with whom Margot and Victor have a precarious association. When set out in this fashion the opposition at the heart of the novel seems to be between the authentic and non-political love of the financially insecure Victor and Margot, and the well-heeled, pretentious, and insubstantial politicking and philosophising of everyone else. If read in this way, the novel can be seen as a simple allegory of authentic human values (or reality) in a world gone mad with inhuman ideologies (unreality).

The opposition between Victor and Margot as real and everyone else as unreal is given its most simple and powerful dramatisation in the fourth part of the novel, which largely takes place at a party held by Sean O’Hara, an important communist of suspect past and dubious commitment, at which all the main characters of the novel are present. The question of the reality or otherwise of the majority of the guests is raised by a drunken Victor, in belligerent response to Margot’s attempts to make him quieter and less offensive: “Not say what I think? Why? Do you suppose that these people are *real*? Do you think they *exist*?” he bellowed darkly in her ear’

¹⁴ The idea of a struggle for reality was mentioned five years earlier in *Snooty Baronet* (1932), where Kell-Imrie, the protagonist, declares that: ‘I saw that I had to *compete* with these other creatures bursting up all over the imaginary landscape, and struggling against me to be *real* – like a passionate battle for necessary air, in a confined place.’ Wyndham Lewis, *Snooty Baronet*, first published 1932, ed. Bernard Lafourcade, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), p. 138.

(*RL*, 162). The possibility of the unreality of the other guests initiates a long passage of reflection by Margot:

Sending her eye out on a secret journey of inspection, she asked herself, shuddering at the question, *were* they real? If they were not, again, did that make it better or did it make it worse? Of course, if she *really* came to believe that they were not, she would feel afraid. Who would not?

Was this after all a great complicated dream she had got into against her volition, where all these vivid likenesses of life only existed in her dreaming mind? Were all these tweed trousers and cotton shirts, buttons and fingernails a few feet away, imaginary, as she had been told so often by Victor that they were? Of all the conversations Victor was apt to hold with such young men as Pete, she perhaps disliked more than any others those that bore upon this topic, namely that of the appearance and the reality.

Apart from anything else, this sort of talk caused her to regard everything, herself, as more shadowy and floating than before. But she had the strongest feeling, whenever she was listening to them, that their intentions were *not* charitable, as *they* argued upon those lines with Victor – for it was *they* who had made Victor believe that he was not “real,” of that she was positive. He had always thought he was real until he met Pete, to that she could swear. The malice would flash out of Pete’s eye. It was *their* reality, that of Victor and herself, that was marked down to be discouraged and abolished, and it was *they* that the others were trying to turn into phantoms and so to suppress. It was a mad notion, but it was just as if they had engaged in a battle of wills, to decide who should possess most *reality* – just as men fought each other for money, or fought each other for food. (*RL*, 162-3)

This passage dramatises the problems caused by Lewis’s belief, expressed in *Time and Western Man*, that, ‘the everyday life is too much affected by the speculative activities that are renewing and transvaluing our world’ (*TWM*, xi), or, in Margot’s language, how ‘this sort of talk’ affects the way she ‘regards everything’. The fact that it is ‘*they*’, i.e. members of the bourgeois-bohemian-bolshevik clique, who are responsible for Victor’s sense of unreality demonstrates how, for Lewis, the problem of the ontological stability of reality is not a self-sufficient existential problem of the isolated individual, but something which happens in response to the presence and discourse of other people. The political aspects of this

diminishment of common-sense stable reality are also emphasised in this passage, by Margot's belief that the notion of unreality propagated by Pete and his friends is intended to discourage, abolish, and suppress the reality of Victor and herself, which she sees as representing the non-political values of art and of love. The philosophy of Pete and his friends, which seems basically to be the 'Time-philosophy' vilified in *Time and Western Man*, is presented as being motivated more by strategic than philosophical concerns. Although Margot dislikes the ideas of Pete and his friends, she is unable to dismiss them, and feels compelled to seek physical proof of Victor's reality by making contact with his body:

the mere notion of Victor as a shadow-person distressed her so much that she grappled him to herself, so that he, at least, should not be outside herself among the *unreals*, resolved to fortify herself against the scepticism in this capital matter, and as a munition against Peteishness to use violence if necessary. Slipping her hand in beneath Victor's arm, she hugged it to her body. As his muscles played about like fishes under his skin, she tried to catch them with her ever-timid fingers, like little apologetic pincers – as if to arrest life, and its reality as well, if she could only catch one and hold it still *in her hand*, extracting it from its bloody element. (*RL*, 163)

The violence present in Margot's mind complicates the idea that she is merely a victim of the ideology of unreality, as her willingness to use violence as a 'munition' suggests that she too is motivated by strategic rather than innocent concerns. The image of Margot grappling herself to Victor and trying to catch one of his fishlike muscles and extract it 'from its bloody element' makes quite clear this underlying violence, and the generally combative nature of her attitude suggests that she views the 'battle of wills' in which she feels herself to be engaged as one which has to be fought with force.

The beginning of the end of Margot's common-sense view of reality is indicated here by the fact that, although she manages to retain her sense of her and Victor's reality, she herself comes to believe in the unreality of everyone else:

As she clung to Victor she felt that what he had said was true, and that they were not in fact so very real at all, the people with which this room was packed. They were a dangerous crowd of shadows, of course, that hovered over them. But if you stood up to them, if you called their noisy shadow-bluff, as Victor would be able to do if he so desired – if it came down to a showdown, between a shadow and a man of flesh and blood – they would give way. She could see that they would move off, chattering, but admitting their ineffectiveness. They could not really bear you down. They could only browbeat you like a gramophone, or impose on you like the projections on the screen of the cinema. Spring up and face them, and they would give way before you. For they had no will. Their will to life was extinct, even if they were technically real. (*RL*, 163-4)

Paradoxically, it is precisely when, in order to re-establish a sense of reality, Margot clings to Victor's body that she begins in some way to accept or realise the truth of what Pete says, and begins to think of the people around her as 'not in fact so very real at all'. Margot's sense of her own reality, grounded, at least for the moment, in the physical reality of Victor, is in fact a reaction to the insistence of Pete and his friends that everything is unreal; given that her sense of her own and Victor's reality is invoked as a defence against her growing sense of the unreality of everyone else, her need to find a physical ground for it implicitly admits the power of the contrary arguments. Margot's re-designation of everyone else as unreal is a partial admission that Pete's ideas were right all along, but she takes refuge in believing that he is only right up to a point and that the spreading sense of unreality does not yet extend all the way to her and Victor.

Margot's hopeful belief that 'if you stood up to them, if you called their noisy shadow-bluff [...] – if it came down to a showdown, between a shadow and a man of flesh and blood – they would give way' and that 'Victor would be able to do if he so desired' is given an initial yet partial vindication in the confrontation between Victor and the group of shady businessmen for whom he comes to forge pictures as a living, in 'The Fakers' section of the novel. The most grotesque of these businessmen is Freddie Salmon, an anti-Semitic caricature, whose features are described entirely in terms of their falsity:

Freddie Salmon had a really enormous false bottom to his face. The face proper obviously terminated a short distance below the line of the lower lip: and what was palpably a bogus jaw had been superadded, for some not very evident purpose, by inscrutable nature; unless, of course, he had grown it himself, in the progress of his mortal career, for ends which, again, were none too clear. It caused him to have a somewhat stupid look, however, at times. And he may of course have desired to look stupid. And it perhaps imparted, observed from immediately in front, a somewhat *soft* appearance to the face. It was not impossible that he may have desired to appear “soft.” But it was so patently *postiche* that it could only have deceived a very inattentive man. (RL, 231-2)

Victor is presented as the absolute opposite of this ‘*postiche*’ stereotype, in terms which stress his natural powerfulness:

an animal amongst men, this young giant crouched, doubled up where he sat, his back eloquently presented to Freddie Salmon should he turn about to address him. A striking picture of the Odd Man Out. For better or for worse these broad and hostile shoulders belonged to Nature, with her big impulsive responses, with her violent freedom, with her animal directness: unconservative, illogical, and true to her elemental self. He subscribed therefore to the larger scheme: the smaller, the watertight, the theoretic, the planning of man’s logic, he repudiated. Like the camel, he must remain a creature of the wild, and never, like the horse, wholly submit to discipline. (RL, 236)

Although apparently more authentic than Freddie Salmon, the figure of Victor presented here is just as much a stereotype, conforming exactly to the requirements of an awkwardly intransigent force of nature. The opposition between Victor’s naturalness and Freddie Salmon’s falseness is given a political twist when he is compared to Nazi Germany: Freddie Salmon takes this as a sign of Victor’s physical brutishness, declaring that ‘the Germans are brutes’ (RL, 244). Victor himself airs anti-Semitic attitudes which focus on the supposedly false nature of the Jews:

“[...] They are sent by their Mitropan pappas, with their names changed, to Oxford or Cambridge to be polished up – to learn how to

cheat people better! To get themselves a nasty little sham polish on their lowbred hides, to trick with, in a shady trade! And that they get away with it shows the world's an outsize sucker, that deserves all it gets and more!" (RL, 240)

The opposition between the authentic and natural Victor and the false and constructed Freddie Salmon seems to be exactly the same as the one between 'a shadow and a man of flesh and blood' that Margot imagined at O'Hara's party, and in 'The Fakers' Victor is allowed his little victory, storming out of the room and, he thinks, the whole world of forgery, after putting his foot decisively through the painting – a fake Van Gogh self-portrait – that he has been working on (RL, 239-40). This violent gesture of Victor's emphasises his status as a figure of uncontrollable nature, whose physicality disturbs the false and unnatural world of 'The Fakers'; when he moves we are told that, 'The workshop was shocked with the impatient revolutions of a heavy body' (RL, 237). This violent, physical triumph of Victor's physicality over the false world of 'The Fakers' is, however, dramatically turned around in the last section of *The Revenge for Love*, 'Honey-Angel', where it becomes obvious that it is not so easy at all for 'a man of flesh and blood' to beat shadows.

The 'Honey-Angel' section begins with Victor and Margot crossing the frontier from France to Spain for what is in Victor's eyes at least nothing more than an innocent tourist excursion, but which is highly suspicious in the eyes of the Spanish police, who have been fooled into thinking that Victor is the leader of a gun-running gang. Margot is uneasy at crossing into Spain, for although 'France was quite unfamiliar enough [...] at least they had not been arming its malcontents with Czechoslovakian machine-guns!' (RL, 261). This unease is registered in her bones: 'all the globetrotting vibrations in her spine were decidedly extinct. Instead, there was established there a numb and convulsive alarm' (RL, 261). Spain becomes for Margot an unreal place which embodies in its geography the 'false-bottoms' that pervade the novel:

with growing apprehension she trod this sullen soil. Here was nothing fast but a false and deceptive surface. Even its touristic blandishments savoured of deceit. She felt that she had engaged upon the crust of something that concealed a bottomless pit, which bristled with uniformed demons, engaged in the rehearsal of a gala Third Degree, to be followed by a slap-up autodafé, for the relaxation of Lucifer. (*RL*, 262)

This sense of unreality and unease prompts Margot to suggest that they turn back and not go ‘farther and farther into this threatening geographical abstraction’, in which they will, she feels, be ‘at every moment beset with uncertainty’, and where ‘a man might be hiding behind that wall, noting their unconcerned advance with satisfaction’ (*RL*, 262). What is important to note is that Margot’s almost paranoid sense of unreality is actually far closer to the truth than Victor’s apparently far more common-sense and ‘realistic’ view of events, for as we soon find out, they are actually being followed by the Spanish police who even do their comic best to hide behind walls (*RL*, 273). It is significant that Margot reads Victor’s unworried behaviour as ‘*just like* a handsome man! There was your handsome man all over!’ (*RL*, 263). Victor’s attitude is seen by Margot as determined by a conformity to a stereotype, that of the Clark Gable-type ‘handsome man’, rather than a recognition of the reality of the situation, a reality which cannot be understood without an understanding of the real effects of unreal abstractions, in this case that of the borders between countries. Margot’s attitude here is very different to her attitude at O’Hara’s party, where it was the real, physical presence of Victor that provided a defence against the unreality of the other guests; on the border between France and Spain this solid, physical reality of Victor’s, and his perception of it, is actually a barrier to an understanding of a reality that is both more fundamentally real and yet saturated with and defined by ideological abstractions.

In the ‘Honey-Angel’ section we witness Margot’s growing realisation that what she saw as realities on which she could ground her perception of the world, e.g. Victor’s body, are not as unproblematically real as she

thought, and that what she previously thought of as unrealities can actually have very real effects.

This realisation of the unreality of what she previously saw as real is given a perhaps too programmatic exposition in the second chapter of 'Honey-Angel', which focuses on Margot's thoughts on nature, as she lies 'upon the bank of a mountain stream' reading Ruskin (*RL*, 275-9). The chapter satirically exposes the gulf between Margot's understanding of nature as informed by an English pastoral tradition, represented here by Ruskin and Wordsworth, and her perception of 'nature in the flesh, as it were' (*RL*, 275). There are two ways to read this chapter: on the one hand, it can be read simply as merely poking fun at the delusions of an aspirational and pseudo-cultivated lower-class English woman, who is stupid enough to believe what she reads; on the other hand, it can be read as a reflection or dramatisation of Lewis's ideological concerns about the loss of the personality due to the erosion of conventional beliefs and the sense of 'reality' they provide by the twentieth-century's 'passion for the Real'. These two different readings cannot be perfectly and harmoniously reconciled: in particular, the satirical and mocking tone of the first approach would seem to trivialise and make the second reading seem a little over-egged. However, this disparity can be seen as a means by which Lewis could insert his more apocalyptic concerns into the novel, safely concealed under the cover of an easy and unsurprising satirical interlude. For example, when Margot asks herself 'Did her quarrel with nature involve everything upon which her personality had been grounded?', and concludes that 'It looked as if it might' (*RL*, 276), the question of the grounding and destruction of the personality that is raised in passing and with a light conversational tone is actually one of Lewis's perennial philosophical and ideological concerns, although its articulation by Margot at this point in the novel disguises this, allowing for the more dramatic events that follow to illustrate this proposition without appearing to be there solely for this theoretical purpose.

The 'quarrel with nature' that Margot refers to above is a result of her 'uneasy surprise' with 'nature in the flesh':

So this is nature: this small bird-woman appeared to be remarking to herself. And she had not been prepared for this, it was pretty plain: without feeling a fish out of water, she nevertheless would not have wished to remain a trout in this particular watercourse. She reserved the right to remain *outside* of nature, now it came to the point; not to participate in its sunny dream. It was *too* sunny altogether! It was too artless; it was too empty; it was too much a senseless agitation of unfeeling things. (RL, 275)

This unease with nature is presented as being the result of the situation in which she finds herself:

Under different circumstances, however, the behaviour of these jolly liquids, the phlegmatic grandeur of these chaotic stones, would have called forth other responses; all would have passed off quite differently had her mind not been obsessed with the actors, for whom these pastoral sets were the incongruous backgrounds, and if she had not been part of this agony of men. It was Victor who was her nature now; and “wild nature” too, at that. (RL, 275-6)

There is an element of nostalgia here, perhaps, for a less troubled time in which the idealised view of nature Margot has subscribed to would have been able to sustain itself, and not been shown as inadequate to ‘this agony of men’. However, there is also a strong feeling that such nostalgia is insufficient, as Margot is part of ‘this agony of men’ and cannot escape it, as shown by the description of the book of Ruskin’s that she is reading as ‘a more subjective and obedient medium’ than the ‘senseless agitation of unfeeling things’ which represents the objective situation in which she is inescapably caught. The fact that what are now exposed as Ruskin’s fictions, rather than realities, are inadequate to ‘the Real’ in which Margot and Victor are caught is made quite explicitly:

She had to confess that at present fate seemed to have the whip-hand of Victor; and that *had* he been a hero in a book, he would have answered to the requirements of Ruskin’s generalization. But Victor *was* not a hero in a book – she only wished he were! They were hemmed in by a chaotic reality, against which “heroism” (book-heroism) would be of little avail. (RL, 278)

Margot asks herself ‘Was this treatise going to follow “nature,” into that limbo into which all her life was falling?’ (*RL*, 276). The answer is, of course, yes, and the chapter ends thus:

She rose to her feet, as if she had suddenly called to mind a pressing engagement. In her haste she left the book lying on the grass. Without looking left or right she started back, at a rapid walk, in the direction of the village. (*RL*, 279)

This newfound determination and what can perhaps be best described as an involuntary decisiveness, together with the abandonment of the Victorian myths on which she had previously relied for her sense of personality, does not represent anything like a triumphant renunciation of an antiquated sense of self and the birth of something like a new and real woman, but the beginning of what Žižek would call the disintegration of the ‘phantasmic frame’ which enables her sense of reality to function. As the novel moves towards its end Margot certainly does begin ‘to perceive reality as an “irreal” nightmarish universe with no firm ontological foundation’, and it becomes clear that ‘this nightmarish universe is not “pure fantasy” but, on the contrary, *that which remains of reality after reality is deprived of its support in fantasy.*’¹⁵ Or, to put it in the terms of *Time and Western Man*, Margot begins to perceive reality without the support of coherent belief, and as such what she perceives lacks a sense of reality and has a ‘dream quality’, even though its violence remains very ‘real’ indeed (*TWM*, 549).

The first indication that Margot has in some way fundamentally changed is given by the manner in which she walks back to the village where she and the others are based: she walks with ‘unprecedented speed [...]. She marched almost, she well-nigh goose-stepped, up the village street, with a quasi-obstreperous eye’ (*RL*, 281-2). This new speed and determination, indicated by her almost Nazi-style marching, is matched by

¹⁵ Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 66

her awareness that: 'She had become an amazon, beside her mountain stream! [...] Ruskin had armed [her eye] with Victorian pugnacity and will-to-live, even in the moment when she had cast him out forever as a queen-maker' (*RL*, 282). Margot returns to the company of Victor and Percy Hardcaster just as it becomes clear that O'Hara has forged Victor's signature in order to make it appear that Victor is the leader of the gang of gun-runners for which he is working, thereby making Victor into a target for the Spanish police. Margot's unease with this situation, which is far more perceptive than Victor's bluff dismissal of it as a 'joke', is made manifest in her physiognomy: 'Margot's eyes were staring more than was natural for a person in a brown study, and her lips had got a smile on them that no joke, however much of a scream, would entirely account for' (*RL*, 285).

This change in Margot, which manifests itself both in the insistence of her protests about the forged signature and in her physical appearance, disturbs Victor, who sees in it aspects of phenomena usually associated by Lewis with his less preferred features of modernity:

this was quite a new departure. [...] She had brought out into the light of common day her secret smile, as before – her overstrained voice; but she had brought out her private imagery as well, [...] that was the trouble: as if the objects of her fancy belonged outside and not inside at all.

She sought to impose them upon the objective reality. To this, as an artist, he somewhat objected. Here was the *sur-réal* – he had nourished it unawares in his own bosom! And as a man he had to confess that he was at a loss to know how to cope with it. He was not even quite sure, to be frank, that he would take on the job! He was not quixotic enough, perhaps, to take on the delusions of a Quixote. His honey-bird in the full regalia of her private mind sitting down at a café table with old Percy and him and insisting upon wearing her nightdress in public – there was about *that* something he did not like.

Everything had become involved in this brutal invasion of the external plane by the internal plane. (*RL*, 288)

At the heart of Margot's transformation, as seen by Victor, is a breakdown of manageable duality resulting in a mixing up of the public and the private, and the external and the internal, exactly the sort of merging that

Lewis set himself against in *Time and Western Man*. Victor, the hyper-masculine artist, cannot deal with this merging because, in a telling phrase, he is 'no quixotic enough'. The idea that the way one might be able to cope with the merging of private and public that Lewis sees as endemic in modernity and which is embodied here in Margot by being 'quixotic' suggests that Lewis sees delusion as playing a defensive role against 'the Real', in much the same way that he saw belief allowing a coherent sense of reality in *Time and Western Man*. If looked at in this way, *The Revenge for Love* admits in the form of fiction the problem inherent in the philosophy proposed in *Time and Western Man*; namely, that the beliefs Lewis looks nostalgically back to cannot deal adequately with the violence of modernity, that being 'quixotic enough' for modernity is not so easy. Lewis's idea of a sense of reality sustained by belief is adequate to a world in which aeroplanes do not fall from the sky, but as in the modern world such things do happen these beliefs will inevitably come under pressures which, he seems to suggest in *The Revenge for Love*, they cannot resist. When faced with Margot in her transformed and driven state, Victor recognises that being 'quixotic' is no longer a viable response, just as Margot became aware of the inadequacy of the ideals of Ruskin to the world of 'nature in the flesh'. Whereas *Time and Western Man* merely expressed the undesirability, in Lewis's eyes, of 'the Real' of modern world, *The Revenge for Love* dramatises its unavoidability and the inadequacy of existing ideological fantasies – those of quixotic chivalry and natural beauty – to that reality.

This unavoidability of 'the Real' of modernity is given perhaps its most blatant symbolisation in the form of the motorcar which is to be used for Victor's gun-running, and in which Victor and Margot attempt to escape from arrest, and ultimately end up dying in. Fredric Jameson has written that the motorcar 'seems to have absorbed all the vitality of the human beings henceforth dependent on it', and that it:

stands as the virtual personification of what Sartre called the *practico-inert*, that malignant desire or anti-freedom which human

beings create over against themselves by the investment and alienation of their labor in objects which return upon them unrecognizably, in the hostile form of a mechanical Necessity. The motorcar is indeed the very locus of metonymic fission, which, transmitted to ever wider circles of objects, ends by drawing life itself [...] into its baleful dominion.¹⁶

The point not to be missed here is that the motorcar does not stand for modernity solely by its status as a technological object, but also because of the process of merging, or what Jameson calls 'metonymic fission' to which it subjects Victor and Margot. Jameson points out: 'For Margot, indeed, the machine is an uncontrollable destiny which nonetheless, perversely and unaccountably, requires our own collusion and accuses our complicity'.¹⁷ In Jameson's opinion this 'collusion' and 'complicity' signifies that 'the monadic isolation of the subject has been overcome: but as though through some grisly misunderstanding, through some blind alienation from without, which cannot be observed but merely felt'.¹⁸ Jameson does not, unfortunately, expand on this point, but it is clear that this overcoming or breakdown of the subject is accomplished by the penetration of the forces of modernity into the minds and even the bodies of Victor and Margot, a process exemplified by Margot's feeling that, although 'she detested this charging beast, that muscular machine', she must, nevertheless, 'cooperate' with it, and 'use must be made of her organs, so it seemed, as well as [the motorcar's] own' (*RL*, 314). This penetration of Margot's subjectivity by 'the Real' of modernity is also shown in the description of her mind as 'the picture-house of the senses' (*RL*, 314), an image which shows how the cinematic, which was used earlier to signify the falseness of the other guests at O'Hara's party (*RL*, 164), has become thoroughly internalised by Margot.¹⁹ Another indication

¹⁶ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, p. 82.

¹⁷ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, pp. 82-3.

¹⁸ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, p. 83.

¹⁹ This penetration of Margot's subjectivity by the cinematic was in fact made perfectly clear at the beginning of the novel, where we learnt that 'she had been born poor, she had taught herself English, and so had evolved a composite speech of her own. It was flavoured with American talkie echoes' (*RL*, 71). The trajectory of the cinematic in the novel – from internalisation as an aspect of self-fashioning, to representing an external

of Margot's internalisation of technology is given by Lewis's description of her perception of the Civil Guards who fatally attempt to stop the motorcar: 'She saw the two guards get bigger and get bigger. It was as if in a series of blinks, or similar to the jumps of a large public clock, where the hands were the size of scythes' (*RL*, 321). Margot's perception of time here is figured in a very different way to the internal, private, and non-mechanical time of Bergson or Proust, to whom the idea of personal time functioning as 'similar to the jumps of a large public clock' would have been anathema. What makes Lewis's 'large public clock' simile even more interesting is that this mechanical and public time only becomes part of Margot's consciousness at a moment of extreme personal strain, indicating that, for Lewis, this time is what is revealed when the 'reality' of the personality is broken down. Far from being an artificial abstraction imposed on the more organic and fluid deep reality of time, mechanical clock time here comes to represent time in 'the Real', as it were; that is, time perceived without the framing illusions of Nature and personality. An analogy can be made with Lewis's comment in *Time and Western Man* that 'A "stream of consciousness" is passing through us – in and out again. But it is a *public* stream. This some of us do not properly understand. We treat it as though it were a *private* stream' (*TWM*, 338). Lewis's point here, in *The Revenge for Love*, and more generally, is that the deeper reality sought after by modernism and its 'passion for the Real' is not a more private and individual reality, free from the weight and constraint of social and historical conventions, but is in fact a deindividualising and objectifying experience in which everything and everyone is reduced to mere interchangeable and meaningless things, and that it is only through beliefs and conventions that any idea of reality or individuality can be sustained at all.

The fact that 'the Real' in *The Revenge for Love* is figured by a 'large public clock' and the increasingly cinematic nature of Margot's perception

threat to the self from unreal others, to internalisation in the form of a malignant colonisation and destruction of the self by modernity – is an interesting one, and worthy of further consideration.

of events demonstrates how, for Lewis, 'the Real' that he wanted to keep at a proper distance through the mediation of belief is figured in terms of the technological and mass-cultural world of modernity. This is significant in two regards: firstly, because it forms the essential link between Lewis's ideological dislike of the world in which he found himself, and his epistemology, indeed all his philosophical and theological thinking; and secondly, because it moves 'the Real' from the category of the ontological and metaphysical back into the unavoidable realm of history. Lewis's thinking is reactionary in its anti-modern tendencies and its wish to retain the old beliefs and, more importantly the barriers that they sustain, but surprisingly, and perhaps unwittingly, radical in its identification of 'the supreme Reality' not with God or any such transcendent abstractions but the very real phenomena of clocks, cinemas, and motorcars. Jameson writes that, in Margot's perception of the motorcar, 'the approach of the Real is unmistakable',²⁰ and we can see, just as we could with Margot's thoughts on nature, the inevitable counterpart of this approach, namely the retreat of the sense of reality as mediated by belief.

One of the most remarkable passages in *The Revenge for Love* describes Margot's perception of the civil guard who is run over by their motorcar:

she discovered herself at last watching against her will the floodlit stretch of rust-red road. Plumes of dust were spurting up; but their car (it had left her behind) was rapidly disappearing and had already grown quite small, in diminishing perspective; while in the foreground she was staring down at a disagreeably flattened object. Sprawling in the centre of the road, it was incredibly two-dimensional and, in short, unreal. It might have just been painted on the earth. But it looked more like a big untidy pattern, cut out of black paper, except for what was the face. That was flat, as well – as flat as a pancake, but as pale as a sheet, with a blue smear where the chin was. It was the chin of Prussian-blue. The flat black headgear of a Civil Guard, likewise no thicker than cardboard, lay a foot away from the head. (*RL*, 325)

²⁰ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, p. 83.

Jameson interprets this passage as being one in which ‘the impossible, unimaginable picture [is] nonetheless imagined in all its impossibility!’, adding that it ‘is of course not meant to represent Margot’s perception of the corpse [...] but reproduces her attempt to visualize it in its absence’.²¹ I would argue that this aerial and disembodied view of the corpse in some way represents an abstraction of the scene, which in its artificiality and unreality and its reduction of the human to a collection of non-human objects (paper, paint, cardboard – all the ingredients of a modernist collage) suggests that Margot’s viewpoint has become one of ‘larger eyes’ which can see ‘god-like lines’, exactly mirroring Lewis’s derogatory description of the process of abstraction practiced by the Cubists.²² The connection between Cubist abstraction and an aerial viewpoint is also made by the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, but in his interpretation this viewpoint is not an impossible one, but one related, somewhat anachronistically, to ‘the Real’ of historical trauma: ‘Historically, cubism anticipated something real, the aerial photographs of bombed-out cities during World War II.’²³ The connection between ‘the Real’, artistic abstraction, and aerial bombardment perhaps becomes less tenuous if we remember that, in an unpublished chapter of *Time and Western Man*, Lewis’s example of a ‘Real’ event that could not be experienced as ‘reality’ was ‘a “crashing” aeroplane dropped on top of you’ (*TWM*, 549). If this line of argument is continued, the fictional and subjective experience of Margot can be seen to ‘anticipate’ the historical and objective phenomena of the aerial bombing of the Spanish Civil War.

²¹ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, p. 85.

²² Wyndham Lewis, ‘A Review of Contemporary Art’, first published in 1915, in *Wyndham Lewis on Art: Collected Writings 1913-1956*, eds. Walter Michel & C. J. Fox, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p. 62.

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno & Rolf Tiedeman, trans. & ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p. 301. Interestingly, Adorno’s proposed anachronistic relationship between art and historical events is itself ‘anticipated’ by Lewis’s comment in *Blasting and Bombardiering* that: ‘It is somewhat depressing to consider how as an artist one is always holding the mirror up to politics without knowing it. My picture called “The Plan of War” painted six months before the Great War “broke out”, as we say, depresses me. A prophet is a most unoriginal person: all he is doing is imitating something that is not there, but soon will be. With me art and war have been mixed up from the start.’ (*BB*, 4)

The extent of Margot's transformation and the collapse of her 'phantasmic frame' in the face of 'the Real' of the 'senseless agitation of unfeeling things' and the 'agony of men' is indicated by the change in her conception of her love for Victor: whereas at O'Hara's party Victor's body could provide a material ground for her sense of reality, during the final drive she realises that in fact she loves Victor as a symbol:

She had long ago made up her mind that Victor was – well, *a symbol*. Some men are symbols. She knew that. They were the very words of an argument, in which she had timidly joined (but she had argued *against* the symbolic man); and they certainly abashed her a great deal of the time with all their chatter of symbols. The word "symbol" was then new to her. And was not her Victor *the symbolic man*, as you might call it, to a fault? She grasped quite well the fact that he *stood for something*. Not for nothing, anything but that. So he could not be a nobody. That was clear enough. She could not in any case have loved a nobody. But she *could* love a *symbol*. And that, as she put it a little hardily, was one up to her. There were some girls who would have shied at a symbol – when they found out it was that. (*RL*, 318)

The split in Margot here between her argument against 'symbolic man' and her knowledge that this is exactly what she loves in Victor seems to reflect the split in Lewis's attitude toward modernity whereby he argues against it but knows that he cannot escape it. It is indicative of Margot's forced acceptance of 'the Real' of the modern that she is forced to admit that she loves Victor because he is a symbol, something she 'had argued *against*', as this signals, as much as her rejection of Ruskin, her capitulation to what she had tried to hold at bay. The similarity between her realisation of the symbolic value of Victor and her rejection of Ruskin can be seen in her identification of Victor as 'Kipling Man' – a title given to him by one of his communist friends – and her recognition that such an idea of masculinity 'was semi-extinct, or [...] was becoming so', and that:

Already Kipling Man was flying in the face of fact – they all had agreed when they were talking about it. It had made her very angry at the time. This sort of Man was in fact an outlaw, at best in a Big Game Park. That was how Tristy had summed the matter up. "With

he of Cromagnon, and he of Neanderthal, the Kipling Man will soon be a skull, and a doubtful femur, and a thing that might have been a rib. Reconstructed, he would figure in an anthropologist's tract." – "He may be magnificent, but he is not Marxian Peace!" Victor had shouted, with a big hearty scoff back that had silenced them. That had brought the debate to an end, and everyone had been ruffled. Victor *would* mention Marx, just to tease them!

How much of this the tendrils of those tender nerves in the small parasite at Victor's side had registered was proved by the intelligent solicitude she had shown him and her cunning reading of the forged writing on the wall. How much she loved this aimless thing! But she was Nature mourning for the mate of her youth. She was the wind sighing in the wart-leaves for its existence among the glacial peaks, after a levelling of all the splendid mountains. She was the sigh of the last rose, and the whisper of the last lily, when the Flower-haters have decreed the extinction of all "luxury-weeds." So, and in that symbolic manner, she could respond to the song of magdalen, brought to her notice by the latter-day wolves, who had suckled her starved intelligence and fed it with Victorian lollypops. (RL, 318-9)

Margot's attitude is ambiguous here, for although she seems to accept this version of Victor and what he symbolises, she clearly does not want to. Lewis's reference to Margot's 'starved intelligence' and those 'latter-day wolves' who 'fed it with Victorian lollypops' makes clear once again the inadequacy of her cultural beliefs – or, if you prefer, her 'phantasmic frame' – to the 'agony of men' in which she, and Victor, are unavoidably entangled. But Lewis is not just criticising Margot for a personal foolishness, but a whole culture – that of interwar Britain – for being unable to withstand the violence of modernity, and, at the same time and not without a certain amount of wistful nostalgia, demonstrating the inadequacy of trying to maintain such beliefs in the face of modernity.²⁴ This disparity between the abstractions of nineteenth-century thought and the realities of the twentieth century is commented on in *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing* (1936), one of Lewis's political books. In *Left Wings Over Europe* Lewis writes of how what he

²⁴ Compare Lewis's statement in *Doom of Youth* that: 'Even more than the Age of Machines this is the age of the machine-guns. Against *these* we are in the position of the "Pore benighted 'eathen of Kipling's day – absurdly brave, but all in vain.'" Wyndham Lewis, *Doom of Youth*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932), p. 48.

sees as a political injustice, the treatment of Nazi Germany by the international community, is the result of such a disparity between historical reality and the abstractions used to understand it:

The abstract conceptions of nineteenth-century liberalist ideology have led directly to this situation. It is a situation in which, busy with theory, we have lost touch with the concrete and the real. We have *freed* with one hand and *enslaved* with the other. We have one-sidedly, and superficially, applied our principle: to-day our principles, since we do not “move with the times”, cause us to be terribly unjust.

We are still busy being “just” in a manner appropriate to a nineteenth-century background. But the scene has changed, without our remarking the fact, with astonishing rapidity. And in this twentieth-century *décor* we appear sometimes as monsters of injustice.

This is not because we are lacking in a sense of justice. It is only because we are slow-moving. It is because we think we have one set of people before us, whereas in fact we have quite a different set.²⁵

Lewis goes on to write that ‘Liberalism substituted itself for christianity: and, dying, it designates communism as its heir’,²⁶ and this sense of the inevitable triumph of communism, of which Lewis did not entirely approve, is perhaps also detectable in the figure of Percy Hardcaster, the one ‘genuine’, although perhaps not sincere, communist in *The Revenge for Love*. Hardcaster’s coldness and detachment are presented as profoundly different to Margot’s more emotional outlook, and, when at the end of the novel he finds himself in a Spanish prison, we learn that:

No illusions with regard to abstract justice troubled the upright cynicism of his outlook. He “played the game.” As ever, with an incorruptible mind, he remained a true “sportsman.” To *himself*, at least, he never pretended that he was hardly used. He accepted, for his political opinions, the status of a game – a game, of course, of life and death. (*RL*, 332)

²⁵ Wyndham Lewis, *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), p. 316.

²⁶ Lewis, *Left Wings Over Europe*, p. 322.

Hardcaster's disillusioned outlook, free from abstractions, extends even to himself:

when he allowed himself to reflect upon the manner of his arrest, and what had led up to it, he sat frowning stolidly at the wall, as downcast as he had ever been in his life. For this man of truth was not in the habit of sparing himself. Indeed, he somewhat enjoyed exercising his incorruptible intellect upon the dissection of Percy Hardcaster. He was like a painter fond of self-portraiture: and his self-portraits were not chocolate boxes! He hit hard when he hit Percy! (*RL*, 334)

This self-scrutiny is of the same sort that Lewis warned against ten years earlier in his essay 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', where Lewis claimed that 'it is comparatively easy to see that another man [...] is absurd; but it is far more difficult to observe oneself in that hard and exquisite light', adding that 'no man has ever continued to live who has observed himself in that manner for longer than flash' ('Meaning', p. 158). Hardcaster's detached self-scrutiny, even if it does not kill him, does affect his physiognomy: 'What his eye took in only deepened his detachment – it seemed even to freeze his face' (*RL*, 335). This physical change in Hardcaster is not the first in the novel; he already has a wooden leg as a result of being shot attempting to escape from prison. This earlier shooting was accompanied by a change in his attitude toward nature which contrasts significantly with Margot's experience of 'nature in the flesh, as it were' (*RL*, 275). Before he is shot Hardcaster tries to display the disdain of a hardened political activist toward nature:

There was not only the fact that Nature was blind to the intellectual beauties of the Social Revolution, and deaf to the voice of Conscience; there was also the fact that Nature, especially in these sumptuous climates, required a spartan watchfulness on the part of the revolutionary, tending to clip the wings of Percy's more civilised muse, and non-party mind. (*RL*, 46)

Unlike Margot, Hardcaster's initial attitude toward nature is a negative one; however, after he has been shot his attitude becomes far more

positive, indeed approximating that of Margot's initial, idealised vision of nature:

He was in quite unexpected harmony, all of a sudden, with Nature – with the shimmering sardine oil of the waters of the river, and that sunburst of diamonds that spattered the velvet sky. (*RL*, 49)

This sense of harmony with nature is matched by an increased sense of objectivity (Margot's problem is that she cannot match her idea of nature with her sense of objectivity) which results in Hardcaster perceiving Don Alvaro – the prison guard by whom he has been shot – as false and constructed:

Objectively Don Percy considered this apparition, as he lay, right eye uppermost, and he was able to examine him with so inordinate a detachment that he saw what he had never seen before. He saw that this man was *false*. His moustache was stuck on – it did not grow there! (*RL*, 50)

Hardcaster's objective consideration of Don Alvaro at the beginning of the novel is matched by his objective consideration of himself at the novel's end, when he is described as being 'like a painter fond of self-portraiture'. This self-objectifying gaze results in his frozen face being replaced by a mask, with which he artfully performs in such a way to do well in the 'game' of being in prison and gain privileges:

Percy proceeded to give a sculpturesque impersonation of THE INJURED PARTY. His cellmates watched him surreptitiously, with an admiration it was out of their powers to withhold. Heavily clamped upon his brickred countenance, held in position by every muscle that responded to Righteous Wrath, was a mask which entirely succeeded the workaday face. It was the mask of THE INJURED PARTY (model for militant agents in distress). Obedient to the best technique of party-training, he sustained it for a considerable time. (*RL*, 336)

However, Lewis himself was not possessed of such obedience, and the narrative deviates from its trajectory, allowing Hardcaster's mask to crack and the emotionality of Margot to have the last word:

But meanwhile a strained and hollow voice, part of a sham-culture outfit, but tender and halting, as if dismayed by the sound of its own bitter words, was talking in his ears, in a reproachful singsong. It was denouncing him out of the past, where alone now it was able to articulate; it was singling him out as a man who led people into mortal danger, people who were dear beyond expression to the possessor of the passionate, the artificial, the unreal, yet penetrating, voice, and crying to him now to give back, she implored him, the young man, Absalom, whose life he had had in his keeping, and who had somehow, unaccountably, been lost out of the world and out of Time! He saw a precipice. And the eyes in the mask of THE INJURED PARTY dilated in a spasm of astonished self-pity. And down the front of the mask rolled a sudden tear, which fell upon the dirty floor of the prison. (RL, 336)

This tear, which comes from within Hardcaster's rigid 'mask', has been described by Fredric Jameson as 'the realest tear in all literature', and he sees in it what he calls the 'burning political message of *The Revenge for Love*', its dramatisation of the very real effects of the symbolic: 'What does not exist reaches out its shadow arm to strike down real flesh and blood, and, itself insubstantial, to leave real corpses behind it'.²⁶ This account of the novel, in which Margot's defiant assertion that 'if it came down to a showdown, between a shadow and a man of flesh and blood – they would give way' is exposed as empty and unreal, is a compelling one, but does not take into account that Margot and Victor do not simply represent a non-ideological human reality opposed to the inhuman abstractions of the communist conspirators and intellectuals, but allegorise the failure of the abstractions, and hence the 'reality', of liberalism in the face of 'the Real' of

²⁶ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, pp. 177, 176. Jameson sees this 'burning political message' as having relevance to America's foreign policy and the intellectuals who justify it, comparing 'the fascist theoreticians and twenties and thirties, many of them genuinely shocked to discover the things for which the words really stood' to 'the postwar generation of American liberal theoreticians, elaborating enthusiastic apologies for the "free world" and exulting in the ingenuity of their own paper strategy and contingency planning, which were at length to realize themselves in the bloody genocide of South-East Asia.' *Fables of Aggression*, p. 177.

the modern world. Their physical demise is accompanied by a disintegration of the fictions by which they have maintained their sense of 'reality', their belief that they are real and everyone else is fake. In this sense, Margot and Victor are doomed not because they are too real to survive in an increasingly abstract world, but because they are too detached from 'the Real', what Margot refers to as 'too much a senseless agitation of unfeeling things': like the liberalism Lewis presents in *Left Wings Over Europe* they 'think [they] have one have one set of people before us, whereas in fact [they] have quite a different set'; they 'have lost touch with the concrete and the real'.

The analogy between Victor and Margot and the liberalism presented in *Left Wings Over Europe* does not entirely do the novel justice, however, largely because its view of reality is too simplistic – you are either in touch with the real or you are not. In the more complex and considered epistemology outlined in *Time and Western Man* being in touch with 'the Real' is a lethal option: 'The Absolute [...] crushes [...] the personal life' (*TWM*, 373). If the ending of *The Revenge for Love* is analysed from this perspective Victor and Margot's demise is due to being too much in touch with 'the Real', rather than out of touch with it. The contradiction between these two readings can be resolved through recourse to the idea of the difference between 'reality' and 'the Real' outlined above: the 'reality' of Victor and Margot has become so inadequate to 'the Real' in which they find themselves that it collapses, and they are plunged into 'the Real' without the protective shield of belief to keep it at a proper distance, a movement symbolised by their plunge over the cliff. Fantasy-sustained 'reality' cannot be just a matter of subjective 'belief, as it was in *Time and Western Man*, but must operate in a dynamic relationship with 'the Real': as Lacan puts it in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), 'The real supports the phantasy, the phantasy protects the real'.²⁷

²⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, first published in French 1973, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York & London: Norton, 1981), p. 41.

To rephrase Jameson, the message of the novel is that ‘real flesh and blood’ requires a measure of ‘what does not exist’ in order not to be destroyed; or, in Žižek’s words, that ‘fantasy is on the side of reality’. The opposition at the heart of *The Revenge for Love* is not between the real and the abstract, but between two competing sets of abstractions, one which proves stronger than the other, and the ‘realities’ that they structure and sustain: Margot’s ‘mad notion’ that ‘they were engaged in a battle of wills, to decide who should possess most *reality*’ turns out not to be so mad at all, so long as we understand ‘reality’ as distinct from ‘the Real’, as outlined above.

The need for abstractions, of beliefs and fictions, for the maintenance of a sense of ‘reality’; an awareness of the weakness of the abstractions inherited from the 19th century and the subsequent weakness of the sense of ‘reality’ that these provide; a distaste for ‘the passion for the Real’: these are all key elements of *The Revenge for Love* and of Lewis’s thinking in general.

Žižek has characterised the relationship between ‘reality’ and ‘the Real’ in corporeal terms:

Let us recall the uncanniness, even disgust, we experience when we endeavour to imagine what goes on just under the surface of a beautiful naked body – muscles, organs, veins. . . . In short, relating to the body implies suspending what goes on beneath the surface. This suspension is an effect of the symbolic order; it can occur only so far as our bodily reality is structured by language. In the symbolic order, even when we are undressed we are not really naked, since skin itself functions as the “dress of the flesh”. This suspension excludes the Real of the life-substance, its palpitation: one of the definitions of the Lacanian Real is that of the flayed body, the palpitation of the raw, skinless red flesh.²⁸

With this in mind, we can see that Margot’s ‘reality’ is doomed from the minute when, at O’Hara’s party, she tries to ground it in Victor’s body, in ‘his muscles’ which she tries to catch and extract from their ‘bloody

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 116.

element'. This going beneath the surface in order to maintain her sense of 'reality' represents the point at which that 'reality', that 'fragile, symbolic cobweb, is ruptured, and 'torn aside by an intrusion of the real'.²⁹ It also represents one of the key paradoxes of Lewis's work: how to maintain the 'reality' of the body, the coherence of its exterior surface, while simultaneously suspending any knowledge of 'what goes on beneath the surface' – which is, of course, precisely that upon which the surface rests. This paradox will manifest itself in the chapters to follow: in Lewis's attempt to maintain the appearance of a separation between mind and body, despite his belief that 'persons' are really only 'things'; in his frequent citation of an almost metaphysical separation between the masculine and the feminine, and his simultaneous questioning of natural biological gender difference; in his use of racial rhetoric despite his denials of racial factors in the determination of consciousness; and in his attempted separation of the eye of the artist from the body of the crowd, a separation which is central to his thinking, but which is never represented as completely successful.

²⁹ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 17.

Chapter Two: Mind-Body

Lewis's critics have tended to portray some form of dualism as an unproblematic and central feature of his work: Hugh Kenner writes that he was a 'man to whose mind the Cartesian split' was 'lifeblood'; Toby Avarad Foshay contends that 'Dualism, the tension of opposites, was an instinctive and visceral response of Lewis's in every sphere of life, a response which he deliberately cultivated and theoretically and polemically promulgated'; and Paul Edwards simply states that 'Lewis seems to have been an instinctive dualist'.¹ In this chapter I will tackle the issue of Lewis's dualism by examining three important texts: the Vorticist 'play' *Enemy of the Stars* (1914; revised version 1932); the theoretical essays published in the collection of short stories *The Wild Body* (1927); and *Men Without Art* (1934). I will argue that although dualism is a key feature of all these texts they are not, when closely examined, as dualistic as they may at first seem, and that dualism is best thought of not as the product of an 'instinct' but as a 'fantasy' or 'belief' used to construct a 'reality' which, like all such 'realities', functions by repressing 'the Real'.

¹ Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis*, (London: Methuen, 1954), p. 139; Toby Avarad Foshay, *Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde: The Politics of the Intellect*, (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 18-9; Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 86.

Enemy of the Stars:

‘All our flesh is the same’

Lewis’s Vorticist ‘play’ *Enemy of the Stars* (I will refer to the original 1914 version) stages a conflict between two characters, Arghol and Hanp, which has been seen by many critics as a dramatisation of Lewis’s ideas of dualism, sometimes understood in terms of mind and body: Toby Avard Foshay, for example, writes that ‘Hanp is the man of the body, Arghol the man of the mind’.²

In one of the most sophisticated interpretations of *Enemy of the Stars* as a dualistic work, Paul Edwards places the ‘play’ within a strand of modernism that includes German Expressionist drama as well as what he calls ‘Futurism’s “esoteric” dimension’. Drawing on Massimo Carrà’s claim that ‘Futurism’s own ringing challenge to the stars [...] needs to be understood as a recrudescence of Gnosticism’ Edwards argues that ‘*Enemy of the Stars* must take its place among such Modernist explorations of Gnostic myth as Marinetti’s own *Conquête des étoiles* and Aleksei Kruchenykh’s *Victory over the Sun*’. Edwards writes that ‘Gnostic dualism [...] is the definitive myth that all versions of alienation tend towards, and is therefore closer to the primal metaphysical issues that concern Expressionism than the particular sexual and familial narrative formations upon which it tends to base its narratives’. Edwards points out Lewis was interested in Gnosticism and in similar metaphysical concerns to those of Expressionism, and argues that *Enemy of the Stars* ‘is, however, as one would expect from an artist like Lewis who was sceptical about fantasies of the transcendence of dualism, a critique of such fantasies as well as an expression of them’. Edwards connects this interest in Gnostic dualism to Romantic concerns about the ‘duality of authentic and inauthentic’, particularly in terms of the self: ‘*Enemy of the Stars* is about precisely such a [Romantic] quest to “speak and act” the original self’. Edwards argues that ‘The character Arghol is a religious ascetic attempting to escape

² Foshay, *Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde*, p. 29.

cosmic necessity. Hanp is his other, more worldly self.³ While there is little doubt that a discourse of this sort is present in *Enemy of the Stars*, and that Arghol himself perceives his situation in terms similar to these, I will argue that within the world of the ‘play’ this dualism is best thought of as a strategy of ‘belief’ or ‘fantasy’ rather than simply an aspect of the ‘play’s’ universe. Indeed, I will argue that dualism is a way of (mis)perceiving ‘the Real’ rather than a fundamental ontological feature of it: dualism is a way of seeing and understanding the world, rather than the way in which the world is structured. Edwards’s interpretation of the ‘play’ is an extremely sophisticated and illuminating one but is limited by its assumption that *Enemy of the Stars* is a philosophical ‘play’, as this assumption precludes investigation of the way in which this is a ‘play’ about philosophy, a ‘play’ which dramatises the role played by the intellectual in a concrete social situation.

The action of the ‘play’ begins with Arghol being given a vicious beating by his uncle, the master of the wheelwright’s yard in which both Arghol and Hanp work. The beating is presented as preordained: ‘The first stars appear and Arghol comes out of the hut. This is his cue’ (*ES*, 97). Arghol is called, replies, and waits for what happens next:

The figure rushed without running. Arghol heeled over to the left. A boot battered his right hand ribs. These were the least damaged: it was their turn.

Upper lip shot down, half covering chin, his body reached methodically. At each blow, in muscular spasm, he made the pain pass out. Rolled and jumped, crouched and flung his grovelling Enceladus weight against it, like swimmer with wave. (*ES*, 99)

The fact that it is the ‘turn’ of ‘his right hand ribs’ indicates that the beating of Arghol by his uncle is a regular event, and the ‘methodical’ way in which he reacts to it suggests a passive compliance, rather than any attempt of resistance or defence. Arghol’s submissiveness is key to philosophical

³ Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, pp. 144-45.

interpretations of the play, as his philosophising first appears in answer to Hanp's inquiry as to why he puts up with this regular violence:

“Can't you kill him, in the name of God? A man has his hands, little else. Mote and speck, the universe illimitable!” Hanp gibed. “It is true he is a speck, but all men are. To you he is immense.” (*ES*, 101)

It is significant that Hanp specifically asks Arghol why he does not use ‘his hands’, as it suggests that Arghol's status as ‘the man of the mind’ is not forced upon him but chosen: he could use his hands, but for some reason he does not. Arghol's answer to Hanp's gibe invokes an abstract notion of his place in the world to justify his inaction: ‘Here I get routine, the will of the universe manifested with directness and persistence’ (*ES*, 101). Arghol's philosophy initially serves to frame his particular situation and explain his behaviour in universal abstract terms; he claims his submission to his uncle's beating is not a matter of personal choice, but one of unavoidable ontological destiny. This reading of Arghol's situation seems to be endorsed by the narrative voice. In the introductory, scene-setting passages Arghol is presented as a ‘gladiator who has come to fight a ghost, Humanity’ and his ‘fight’ as futile: he is a ‘CONDEMNED PROTAGONIST’ and the audience, consisting of ‘the cream of Posterity’, ‘BREATH IN CLOSE ATMOSPHERE OF TERROR AND NECESSITY TILL THE EXECUTION IS OVER, THE RED WALLS RECEDE, THE UNIVERSE SATISFIED’ (*ES*, 98). However, this doom-laden atmosphere of universal necessity is tempered by a less serious strand within the introductory passages. The ‘actors’ wear ‘MASKS FITTED WITH TRUMPETS OF ANTIQUE THEATRE, WITH EFFECT OF TWO CHILDREN BLOWING AT EACH OTHER WITH TIN TRUMPETS’ (*ES*, 97). There is a move here from images of Greek tragedy to images of childish games, and this mismatch of genre and register, this uneasy cohabitation of the tragic and the comic, persists through the play. It is important to be aware of the way in which Arghol's philosophising, which is on the side of the tragic, is challenged by the objections of Hanp. For example, Arghol articulates in a

highly serious and philosophical manner a theory of the 'degradation' of the soul by social contact with others:

The process and condition of life, without any exception, is a grotesque degradation, and 'souillure' of the original solitude of the soul. There is no help for it, since each gesture and word partakes of it, and the child has already covered himself with mire.

Anything but yourself is dirt. Anybody that is. I do not feel clean enough to die, or to make it worth while killing myself. (*ES*, 106)

Hanp responds to this with a 'laugh, packed with hatred' and tells Arghol that his philosophy is 'Sour grapes!' (*ES*, 106). Arghol's philosophising constantly moves away from the particular situation in which he is embedded and where he is subjected to, and indeed submits to, regular violence to a more abstract and grandiloquent level, which gives his situation some sort of ontological justification and aesthetic resonance and allows him to indulge in misanthropic fantasies of authenticity. Hanp's hate-packed laughter interrupts this abstract discourse, and brings the concrete situation back into view, telling Arghol that 'you let yourself be kicked to death here out of spite' (*ES*, 106). Arghol's reaction to Hanp's gibe is interesting:

Disrespect or mocking is followed, in spiritualist séances, with offended silence on part of the spooks. Such silence, not discernedly offended, now followed.

The pseudo-rustic Master, cavernously, hemicyclically real, but anomalous shamness on him in these circumstances, poudre de riz on face of knight's sleeping effigy, lay back indifferent, his feet lying, two heavy closed books, before the disciple.

Arghol was a large open book, full of truths and insults.

He opened his jaws once more in egotistic self castigation. (*ES*, 106-7)

This passage undermines Arghol's assumed position as philosophical guru, calling him a 'pseudo-rustic Master', implicitly referring to him as a 'spook', commenting on his 'anomalous shamness', and showing his silence to be an automatic and conventional response to Hanp's gibe. This

is the first time in the 'play' that Hanp is referred to as Arghol's 'disciple', which is significant as it suggests that Hanp's role may be as 'sham' as Arghol's, and likewise generated by the conventions of 'spiritualist séances' rather than simply reflecting the reality of the situation. Arghol's 'egotistic self castigation' takes the form of a speech in which he expounds on the ill effects of other people on the individual:

The doctoring is often fouler than the disease.

Men have a loathsome deformity called Self; affliction got through indiscriminate rubbing against their fellows: social excrescence.

Their being is regulated by exigencies of this affliction. Only one operation can cure it: the suicide's knife.

Or an immense snuffling or taciturn parasite, become necessary to victim, like abortive poodle, all nerves, vice and dissatisfaction.

I have smashed it against me, but it still writhes, turbulent mess.

I have shrunk it in frosty climates, but it has filtered filth inward through me, dispersed till my deepest solitude is impure.

Mire stirred up desperately, without success in subsequent hygiene. (*ES*, 107)

An idealised dualism between the 'I' and its 'fellows' is clear here, as is Arghol's anxiety that there is no clear boundary between the two and that his 'being is regulated by exigencies of this affliction'. Arghol's theory of the relationship between the individual self, the 'I', and the more social 'loathsome deformity called Self' to which it is opposed is interesting, and many critics have written extensively about the intricacies of Arghol's philosophy and its significance, but Hanp's reaction to it is also significant, and at least as interesting:

This focussed disciple's physical repulsion: nausea of humility added. Perfect tyrannic contempt: but choking respect, curiosity; consciousness of defeat. These two extremes clashed furiously. The contempt claimed its security and triumph: the other sentiment baffled it. His hatred of Arghol for perpetually producing this second sentiment grew. This would have been faint without physical repulsion to fascinate him, make him murderous and sick.

He was strong and insolent with consciousness stuffed in him in anonymous form of vastness of Humanity: full of rage at gigantic

insolence and superiority, combined with utter uncleanness and despicableness – all back to physical parallel – of his Master.

The more Arghol made him realize his congenital fatuity and cheapness, the more a contemptible matter appeared accumulated in the image of his Master, sunken mirror. The price of this sharp vision of mastery was contamination. (*ES*, 107)

The philosophic scheme by which Arghol attempts to define his place in the world and give his situation a sense of cosmic inevitability does not do the same for Hanp, whose reaction to it is suitably dualistic but within whom the ‘two extremes clashed furiously’. Arghol’s criticisms of Hanp strike home – Hanp ‘realize[s] his congenital fatuity and cheapness’ – but in doing so they rebound on Arghol as well, who becomes a ‘sunken mirror’ of Hanp. From Hanp’s point of view Arghol’s criticisms are correct but they apply to Arghol as well: the opposition between the two which Arghol’s philosophy attempts to create breaks down – he is not seen to occupy the positive position but shares the negative one with Hanp. ‘The price’ of Arghol’s ‘sharp vision of mastery’ is indeed ‘contamination’: ‘contamination’ by that which he attempts to define himself against. As we will see in Chapter Three the pattern of a protagonist articulating an ideal position which he is unable to occupy is a recurrent one in Lewis’s work.

Arghol attempts to escape what he sees as his inevitable ontological condition through a course of inaction and passivity rather than by using his hands, characterising his strategy thus:

Accumulate in myself, day after day, dense concentration of pig life. Nothing spent, stored rather in strong stagnation, till rid at last of evaporation and lightness characteristic of men. So burst Death’s membrane through, slog beyond, not float in appalling distances.

Energy has been fixed on me from nowhere – heavy and astonished: resigned. Or is it for remote sin! I will use it, anyway, as prisoner his bowl or sheet for escape: not as means of idle humiliation. (*ES*, 104)

This strategy of resigned accumulation of the unavoidable in hope of some eventual transcendence – ‘burst Death’s membrane through’ – is, as Edwards helpfully points out, an ascetic strategy that Lewis seems to have

derived from the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. Edwards contends that: ‘The heavily material imagery of this passage is surprising in this context, but the intention behind it is clear enough. Arghol wishes for a complete escape from the system’.⁴ While Edwards is right about Arghol’s intention it is surprising that he is surprised by the use of ‘heavily material imagery’, as this imagery signals the futility, already announced in the introductory passages, of Arghol’s wish. As we have already seen, Edwards argues that ‘one would expect from an artist like Lewis who was sceptical about fantasies of the transcendence of dualism, a critique of such fantasies’, and such a critique is implicit in this material imagery. Indeed, such imagery suggests a continuum rather than a separation between the physical and the mental, and as we will see, this possibility haunts the ‘play’. Edwards is aware of these ‘continuities’ but dismisses their importance, writing that although they ‘suggest an ultimate identity of Arghol with the principle he opposes [...] the text and narrative are more concerned with his duality than with any ultimate physical or metaphysical unity with an Absolute – a question that arises only as a distraction in this text but came to haunt all Lewis’s future work’.⁵ I would argue that another ‘unity’ haunts this text: the spectre of the absence of any ontological distinction between Arghol and Hanp – the spectre, that is, of their fundamental equality as slaves of the same master.

Edwards interprets Arghol’s submission to his uncle’s beatings as rooted in his attitude of Schopenhauerian asceticism, writing that he ‘submits to, even invites, these attacks [by his uncle] in order to help him realise more perfectly “the will of the universe”’.⁶ While this interpretation makes sense from Arghol’s point-of-view, and possibly even the narrator’s, Hanp’s interpretation of Arghol’s philosophy as ‘Sour grapes’ forms an important counter-discourse, which deflates Arghol’s abstract tendencies and offers an alternative, critical interpretation.

⁴ Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, p. 150.

⁵ Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, p. 150.

⁶ Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, p. 149.

Hanp's suspicion that Arghol is unwilling, rather than ontologically unable, to act is given credence by the violent fight between the two, initiated by Hanp and won by Arghol. Arghol is aware that by using 'his hands' and fighting Hanp he is contravening his earlier philosophy of passive submission, thinking to himself 'To break vows and spoil continuity of instinctive behaviour, lose a prize that would only be a trophy tankard never drunk from, is always fine' (*ES*, 110). Again, Arghol's thoughts seem to lag behind the situation and justify it after the fact.

The fight is also interesting as it seems to demonstrate some sort of equality between Arghol and Hanp, together with a breakdown of the barrier between mind and body. This impression of equality is signalled partly by the use of impersonal pronouns, as in the following passage, in which it becomes increasingly unclear exactly who is doing what to whom and for what reason:

Strike his disciple as he had abused him. Suddenly give way.
Incurable self taught you a heroism.

The young man brought his own disgust back to him. Full of disgust: therefore disgusting. He felt himself on him. (*ES*, 110)

It is unclear exactly who the 'young man' is, and each of the three pronouns in the last sentence could apply equally logically to either Arghol or Hanp, grammatically enacting the confusion of the tussle, and the lack of distinction which accompanies it. This lack of distinction or equality is also narrated more clearly: 'they hit each other, both with blows about equal in force' (*ES*, 110). The physicality of the fight is stressed by reference to the physicality of the soul in the form of the brain:

Soul perched like aviator in basin of skull, more alert and smaller than on any other occasion. Mask stoic with energy: thought cleaned off slick – pure and clean with action. Bodies grown brain, black octopi. (*ES*, 110-1)

As we will see, this idea of 'Bodies grown brain' recurs in Lewis's essay 'Inferior Religions', where he writes that 'Laughter is the brain-body's

snort of exultation' ('Religions', p. 152). In both cases, some instinctive physical reaction – laughter or violence – is seen to result in the erasure of the distinction between mind and body. Viewed philosophically it is interesting that the supposed physiological location of the soul is 'in basin of skull' as in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649) René Descartes claims that:

although the soul is joined to the whole body, there is yet a certain part of it in which it exercises its functions more particularly than in all the others [...] I have clearly ascertained that the part of the body in which the soul exercises its functions immediately is in nowise the heart, nor the whole of the brain, but merely in the most inward part of it, to wit, a certain very small gland which is situated in the middle of its substance[.]⁷

This 'very small gland' serves to bridge the gap between mind and body inherent in Descartes' dualism, but, by providing a particular physiological location for the soul, it also risks collapsing mind-body dualism altogether, a risk also present in Arghol's fight with Hanp.

It is perhaps ironic that the purity and cleanliness which Arghol wished to reach by ascetic means is achieved by violent physical action and its slick cleaning off of thought, and the physicality of Arghol's victory over Hanp is also ironic: in the terms of a dualistic mind-body interpretation of *Enemy of the Stars*, mind has just given body a sound thrashing, although in doing so it has possibly become something else. This thrashing was achieved by Arghol's complete abandonment of his self to what we could call, following Edwards's Schopenhauerian interpretation, 'the will of the universe':

Arghol did not hit hard. Like something inanimate, only striking as rebound and as attacked.

He became soft, blunt paw of Nature, taken back to her bosom, mechanically; slowly and idly winning.

He became part of responsive landscape: his friend's active punch key of the commotion. (*ES*, 111)

⁷ René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane & G. R. T. Ross, Vol. II, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1931). p. 345.

Rather than remaining in what Lewis called in 'Physics of the Not-Self' (1932), his 'metaphysical commentary' on *Enemy of the Stars*, 'the traditional rôle' of the human mind as 'an oddity outside the machine', Arghol here becomes the machine, abandoning the role of mind altogether.⁸

The fight disturbs the whole dualistic scheme of mind and body, as after it opposed qualities merge into each other, and Arghol begins to perceive thoughts in a physical and violent way:

A strong flood of thought passed up to his fatigued head, and at once dazed him. Not his body only, but being was out of training for action: puffed and exhilarated. Thoughts fell on it like punches. (*ES*, 111)

Just as 'bodies' became 'brain' during the fight, in its aftermath 'thoughts' become 'punches'. Although these images retain terms which could be schematised in terms of 'mind' and 'body' they do not retain an oppositional dualism between them, rather combining and confusing the two poles. Tired by the fight, Arghol falls asleep and dreams.

Arghol's dream takes him back to his time as a university student in an unidentified capital city. Arghol finds a copy of Max Stirner's *Einzig und Sein Eigentum* (translated into English as *The Ego and Its Own*) which he throws out of the window. The volume is, however, returned to him by a figure who first appears as 'a young man he had known in the town' but who changes into 'his present disciple', although Arghol considers that 'Obliquely, [...] he appeared now to be addressing Stirner' (*ES*, 112). The figure changes again, into 'A middle aged man, red cropped head and dark eyes, self-possessed, loose, free, student-sailor, fingering the book: coming to a decision. Stirner as he had imagined him' (*ES*, 112). The figure will not leave with the book, and 'A scrap ensued, physical experiences of recent fight recurring, ending in eviction of this visitor and

⁸ Wyndham Lewis, 'Physics of the Not-Self', first published 1932, in *Collected Poems and Plays*, ed. Alan Munton, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1979), p. 195.

slamming of door' (*ES*, 112). Deciding that 'These books are all parasites. Poodles of the mind' Arghol tears them up and leaves his room to find his friends in a café: 'But he never reached the Café' (*ES*, 113). After this failed meeting 'His dream changed; he was now walking down the street in his native town, where he now was, and where he knew no one but his school-mates, workmen, clerks in export of hemp, grain and wood' (*ES*, 113). He meets 'one of the friends of his years of study in Capital' and declares to him 'Sir, I wish to know you!' (*ES*, 113). A strange exchange takes place in which his friend reminds Arghol that he knows him already, and Arghol 'saw a man directly beneath his friend, imprisoned, with intolerable need of recognition' (*ES*, 113). This leads Arghol to speculate on the relationship of self and others:

Arghol, that the baffling requirements of society had made, impudent parasite of his solitude, had foregathered too long with men, and borne his name too variously, to be superseded.

He was not sure, if they had been separated surgically, in which self life would have gone out and in which remained.

"This man has been masquerading as me."

He repudiated Arghol, nevertheless.

If eyes of his friends-up-till-then could not be opened, he would sweep them, along with Arghol, into rubbish heap.

Arghol was under a dishonouring pact with all of them.

He repudiated it and him.

"So I am Arghol."

"Of course. But if you don't want - ."

"That is a lie. Your foolish grin proves you are lying. Good day."

Walking on he knew his friend was himself. He had divested himself of something. (*ES*, 114)

The dream ends in 'a Café; he, alone, writing at table'. However, Arghol is not completely alone:

He became slowly aware of his friends seated at the other end of room, watching him, as it had actually happened before his return to his uncle's house. There he was behaving as a complete stranger with a set of men he had been on good terms with two days before.

"He's gone mad. Leave him alone," they advised each other.

As an idiot, too, he had come home; dropped, idle and sullen, on his relative's shoulders. (*ES*, 114)

The contrast between the city, associated with intellectual study and friends, and the town, associated with work and family, is an important feature of this dream, and suggests another dualism, sociological rather than metaphysical, may be at work. Fredric Jameson argues that ‘what we call artistic or aesthetic “modernism” essentially corresponds to a situation of incomplete modernization’, that it emerges in ‘a world that is still organized around two distinct temporalities: that of the new industrial big city and that of the peasant countryside’.⁹ This situation, Jameson argues, results in a split consciousness:

In this transitional era, people – but it would be better to say, intellectuals, and the writers and the ideologists who are part of that category – still live in two distinct worlds simultaneously. This simultaneity can no doubt for a moment be cast in terms of some distinction between the metropolis and the provinces; but it might better be imagined in terms of a situation in which individuals originate in a “pays”, a local village or region to which they periodically return, while pursuing their life work in the very different world of the big city.¹⁰

The ‘situation’ that Jameson outlines can be seen in Arghol’s dream, but unlike Jameson’s model intellectual Arghol does not move between two worlds but has moved from one to the other and back again, where he is stuck and is violently forced to do manual work. This move from an urban world of intellectual speculation and chosen friends back to one of physical labour and the unavoidable biological link with family is an important factor in Arghol’s philosophy, or, as Hanp calls it, his ‘Sour grapes’. Arghol’s dream is significant not only for his violent repudiation of Stirner but also because it displays the split social situation that, I will argue, lies behind his metaphysical dualism.

After his dream and a ‘confused struggles and vague successions of scenes’ Arghol finds that ‘A riddle had been solved’:

⁹ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, (London & New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 141-2.

¹⁰ Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 142.

He was Arghol once more.

Was that a key to something? He was simply Arghol.

“I am Arghol.”

He repeated his name – like sinister word invented to launch a new Soap, in gigantic advertisement – toilet-necessity, he, to scrub the soul.

He had ventured in his solitude and failed. Arghol he had imagined left in the city. – Suddenly he had discovered Arghol who had followed him, in Hanp. Always a deux! (*ES*, 114-5)

This realisation of the failure of his solitude and the realisation that he is fundamentally dual himself – ‘Always a deux!’ – may suggest that Arghol has finally come to terms with his situation and dropped what Hanp saw as his ‘gigantic insolence and superiority’. Although this may imply a coming to terms with his antagonism with Hanp it does not mean that he has come to terms with the totality of his situation: in particular his acceptance of duality does not seem to include the figure of the uncle, his violent employer; Arghol may be reconciled to some degree with the one he has designated as his other and his ‘disciple’, but he has not come to terms with his ‘master’, whom he and the narrative of the ‘play’ seem to have forgotten.

The ‘play’ ends with Hanp murdering Arghol and committing suicide, a double death which leaves the uncle unscathed. Hanp is provoked to kill Arghol by his disgust at Arghol’s snoring. That snoring is the reason for Arghol’s death is interesting for two reasons: firstly, in terms of mind-body dualism, body kills mind because it is disgusted by mind’s physicality; secondly, snores themselves have a sort of liminal physicality. Snores are physical in that they issue from the body but they have no tangible physical presence, being a vibration rather than an object. A snore is a physical phenomenon but is not a physical object, in the common sense of the term. Arghol’s snoring and Hanp’s murderous reaction to it disturbs the mind-body scheme both because it inverts the relationship of disgust that Arghol, and perhaps the narrator, try to establish, and because snoring –

as something material and insubstantial, corporeal and disembodied – itself does not fit easily into this dualistic scheme.

Arghol's snore and its effect on Hanp are described in vividly physical terms:

Bluebottle, at first unnoticed, hurtling about, a snore rose quietly on the air.

Drawn out, clumsy, self-centred! It pressed inflexibly on Hanp's nerve of hatred, sending hysteria gyrating in top of diaphragm, flooding neck.

It beckoned, filthy, ogling finger.

The first organ note abated. A second at once was set up: stronger, startling, full of loathsome unconsciousness.

It purred a little now, quick and labial. Then virile and strident again.

It rose and fell up centre of listener's body, and along swollen nerves, peachy, clotted tide, gurgling back in slimy shallows. Snoring of a malodorous, bloody, sink, emptying its water.

More acutely, it plunged into his soul with bestial regularity, intolerable besmirching.

Aching with disgust and fury, he lay dully, head against ground. At each fresh offence the veins puffed faintly in his temples. (*ES*, 117)

The snore is presented as having a tangible effect on Hanp's consciousness: it 'presses[s] inflexibly' on Hanp's nerves; it is personified as a 'filthy, ogling finger'; and it is seen as having a liquid, rather than merely atmospheric, presence – a 'clotted tide'. Arghol's snore 'besmirches' Hanp's 'soul' much in the same way that Arghol claimed that his 'soul' was stained by the 'process and condition of life'. Hanp's disgust at this 'besmirching' snore is best understood as a disgust at the social, at the unavoidable presence of other people. In Lewis's work in general we can see a certain distaste for the aural: in 'Cantleman's Spring-Mate' (1917) Cantleman's disgust at one of his fellow soldiers is indicated by his comment that 'To see this face was like *hearing* perpetually a cheap and foolish music' (*UP*, 80); in *Time and Western Man* Lewis expresses a dislike for the penetrative quality of music, complaining of the way 'music moves through you' (*TWM*, 170). Arghol's snore is also described as musical – an 'organ note' – and is described as penetrating Hanp's body:

‘It rose and fell up centre of listener’s body’. Hanp’s physical disgust with Arghol’s snore mirrors Arghol’s philosophical disgust with the world, and, unlike Arghol, Hanp is willing to use ‘his hands’ to try and change the situation:

Like a sleek shadow passing down his face, the rigour of his discomfort changed, sly volte-face of Nature. [...]

He got up, held by this foul sound of sleep, in dream of action. Rapt beyond all reflection, he would, martyr, relieve the world of this sound.

Cut out this noise like a cancer. (*ES*, 117)

Hanp’s desire to surgically remove the object of his annoyance reflects Arghol’s earlier statement that the ‘suicide’s knife’ is the only cure for ‘affliction got through indiscriminate rubbing against their fellows’ (*ES*, 107). Unlike Arghol, however, Hanp is able to carry through his murderous desire and eventually even commit suicide himself.

Arghol reacts to being stabbed in a mechanical way: ‘Arghol rose as though on a spring, his eyes glaring down on Hanp, and with an action of the head, as though he were about to sneeze’ (*ES*, 118). This reaction suggests a purely instinctual and bodily response: at the moment of his death Arghol is, reasonably enough, a man of automatic instinct rather than one of ascetic contemplation and sophisticated philosophy. This reduction of Arghol to pure body is met with approval by Hanp:

There was something incredible in the dead figure, the blood sinking down, a moist shaft into the ground. Hanp felt friendly towards it.

There was only flesh there, and all our flesh is the same. Something distant, terrible and eccentric, bathing in that milky snore, had been struck and banished from matter. (*ES*, 118)

By killing Arghol and reducing him to a pure mindless body Hanp removes something ‘distant, terrible and eccentric’ that existed within Arghol and bathed in his ‘milky snore’. This ‘something’ would seem most likely to be the ‘soul’, whose ‘original solitude’ Arghol felt had been stained by social life, and whose removal prompts ‘Relief of grateful universe’ (*ES*, 118).

This relief, however, does not extend to Hanp, who experiences a 'rapid despair [...], a galloping blackness of mood', and he moves 'quickly to outstrip it, perhaps' (*ES*, 118). As he moves out of the yard, Hanp encounters another person:

Near the gate of the yard he found an idle figure. It was his master. He ground his teeth in this man's face, with an aggressive and furious movement towards him. The face looked shy and pleased, but civil, like a mysterious domestic. (*ES*, 118-9)

It is unclear whether his 'idle figure' is the ghost of Arghol or the uncle, as both are Hanp's 'master', the former figuratively, the latter literally. This ambiguity is important as by subtly introducing the question of who is the 'master' it makes us question the assumption, shared by both Hanp and Arghol, that Arghol is Hanp's master.¹¹ Looking back at the 'play' we can see that this assumption is based solely on Arghol's own rhetoric, in contradistinction to that of the status of the 'uncle' as 'master' which is based on physical violence. That the 'uncle' is a more substantial 'master' does not mean that it is his 'shy and pleased' face that Hanp sees as he leaves the yard: indeed, from Hanp's point-of-view what is important is that he has encountered the figure of authority, whether real or spectral, and that this encounter leads to his suicide. Hanp leaves the 'master' and 'walked slowly along the canal to a low stone bridge. [...] He sprang from the bridge clumsily, too unhappy for instinctive science, and sank like lead, his heart a sagging weight of stagnant hatred' (*ES*, 119). Hanp's suicide seems inevitable, as it restores the unhappy symmetry between him and Arghol, but we might ask Hanp the same question he asked Arghol after the initial beating: 'Can't you kill him, in the name of God?' (*ES*, 101). At both the beginning and the end of the play the appearance of the 'master' forces someone into actions contrary to their physical self-interest, either submission or suicide.

¹¹ This ambiguity is not present in the 1932 version of *Enemy of the Stars* where the figure that appears to Hanp is clearly identified as the 'uncle', using his alternative designation as the 'super'. *Collected Poems and Plays*, p. 191.

The appearance of the 'master' at the beginning and the end of the play has been overlooked in previous interpretations of the 'play', which focus on the dualistic bickering between Hanp and Arghol. Although the intricacies of this argument are obviously significant and interesting, it is important to remember that this is a 'play' of three 'characters', and that any speculation as to the meaning of the 'play' must account for them all.

Edwards writes that 'Hanp versus Arghol [...] is simply Arghol as his own ideal [...] versus the part of Arghol that this ideal life is ashamed of'. The idea that Hanp is in some way merely a part of Arghol or a projection of a part of him is interesting as it refigures the conflict of the 'play' as one within an individual rather than as one between individuals. Indeed, Edwards argues that '*Enemy of the Stars* as a whole, including its philosophy, is presented as the projection of the same psychological conflict'.¹² A similar interpretation was proposed by Hugh Kenner, who wrote that 'Arghol's grudge against Hanp is that, being in a sense Arghol's creation, he is Arghol's Ape' and that 'Hanp, insofar as he is real for Arghol has been created by him'.¹³ Toby Avard Foshay takes it even further, arguing that "The 'plot' of *Enemy* is Arghol's gradual discovery that his conflict with Hanp is really a conflict internal to himself, between his own mind and body' and that Hanp's decapitation of Arghol is 'a further physical correlative of the mind/body conflict taking place between himself and Arghol and within Arghol himself'.¹⁴

Understanding *Enemy of the Stars* as a conflict within the individual psyche is an interesting and suggestive critical move, which accounts for the strange dream-like logic of the 'play' and the awkward similarities between the two main characters. It does not, however, account for the 'whole' of the 'play', as it overlooks the figure of the 'uncle', who has a structurally significant role in the action, initiating it with his violence and concluding it with his threatening appearance. If the 'uncle' were to be included in such a psychological interpretation, this would involve a move

¹² Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, p. 154.

¹³ Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis*, p. 23.

¹⁴ Foshay, *Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde*, p. 29.

from a dualistic model of the psyche to a tripartite one: in Freudian terms, this could be seen as a recognition of the role of the superego. The identification of Arghol as ascetic ego and Hanp as sensual id is fairly straightforward, and remains, figuratively, locked in one individual psyche. Introducing the 'uncle' as superego into the equation both makes the interpretation more sophisticated, and, more importantly, extends it beyond the individual psyche, raising questions of social authority. The yard within which the agon between Arghol and Hanp is played out belongs to the 'uncle', and so, on an allegorical level, it is he who sets the limits for the action. On a more literal level it is the fact that they are both employees of the 'uncle' that brings Arghol and Hanp together: it may seem like a mundane point, but Arghol and Hanp are co-workers as well as philosophical archetypes. It is easy to see what is lost in the interpretative move from three literal characters to two allegorical characters made by most critics: the employer, and with it the recognition that in terms of work Arghol and Hanp share the same status. Restoring this literal occupational context alters the interpretation at an allegorical level: Arghol can now be seen as the archetypal university graduate stuck in an unfulfilling job, turning his bitterness against his less educated colleagues, rather than doing anything concrete to alter the situation. In designating Hanp as his 'other' Arghol, and perhaps the narrator, construct an antagonistic dualism that represses the underlying structural opposition between the 'uncle' on the one hand and his employees, Hanp and Arghol, on the other. This fundamental repressed dualism is far more available to a literal-minded reading than an eagerly allegorical one.

Once this occupational context and repressed dualism is restored we can see clearly how Arghol's philosophising functions as ideology, in the Althusserian sense of that which '*represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence*'.¹⁵ Arghol's dualistic philosophy provides him with an imaginative scheme which, although it

¹⁵ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation' in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), p. 109.

misperceives his 'real conditions', nevertheless makes it appear meaningful. Expressed in the terms developed in Chapter One, dualism is the 'belief' or 'fantasy' by which Arghol attempts to maintain a meaningful sense of 'reality' in the face of 'the Real' of his situation.

By restoring the fundamental dualism of the 'play' by a literal-minded reading we are able to see how the play allegorises not only a particular philosophy, but also the general situation of philosophical thought. In Arghol's philosophising we can see the birth of theory out of the timid refusal of praxis: his philosophy and the dualism with which he understands the world is a response to Hanp's question 'Can't you kill him, in the name of God?' By imagining his existence as part of a dualistic agon, Arghol is able to forget his 'uncle' and with it the real forces which limit and determine his existence. Hugh Kenner has described the relationship between Arghol and Hanp using an intriguing astronomical figure:

like the double star Algol (*Alpha Persei*) after which he is named, Arghol must – as the very condition of his existence – waltz eternally about a common centre of gravity with this unluminous companion, which eclipses his light with clockwork periodicity and transforms the effulgence of genius into a recurrent demoniacal wink.¹⁶

It is this 'common centre of gravity' which is disavowed in Arghol's dualistic philosophy and in dualistic interpretations of *Enemy of the Stars*: the 'common centre' is the 'uncle' and the mundane world of work. The disavowal of this 'common centre' also allows Arghol to deny the commonality between him and Hanp, something which is ultimately restored at the end of the 'play'. Arghol's philosophy is also an attempt to create a solid ontological distinction by the power of thought alone. There is perhaps an analogy here with *The Childermass* where, in response to Pullman's assertion that the peons are 'Not like us', Satters replies: 'Not like us? What is the difference? Are we very different? I believe we only think we're different' (C, 43). *Enemy of the Stars* dramatises Arghol's

¹⁶ Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis*, p. 23.

efforts, and their failure, to establish, by means of metaphysical thought, a categorical ontological difference between himself and Hanp, between the big-city intellectual and the small-town labourer. But both characters are trapped in the same situation with the same 'common centre of gravity', and in the end all that remains is their most basic, physical commonality: 'There was only flesh there, and all our flesh is the same'.

The Wild Body:

‘Laughter is the brain-body’s snort of exultation’

Lewis’s essay ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’ was published as part of *The Wild Body* (1927), a collection of short stories, most of them reworkings of pre-war works portraying the lives of peasants, mostly Breton, in an unsympathetically comic fashion. Together with the essay ‘Inferior Religions’ ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’ attempts to set out Lewis’s theory of the comic, and so elucidate the stories that precede it. The importance of mind-body dualism for the argument of ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’ is made clear in its opening lines: ‘First, to assume the dichotomy of mind and body is necessary here, without arguing it; for it is upon that essential separation that the theory of laughter here proposed is based’ (‘Meaning’, 157). It is highly significant that Lewis ‘assumes’ and sees as ‘necessary’ but does not, or perhaps cannot, ‘argue’ this ‘dichotomy’, as this indicates that the philosophical ground on which he bases his theory of laughter is one that he cannot justify, and so does not form a solid ground for his theory. Lewis’s ‘essential separation’ is presented as something which has to be believed but cannot be fully known: a matter of faith rather than reason. I will argue that Lewis’s theory of laughter presupposes a ‘belief’ in the distinction between the laugher and the laughed-at that his texts show is unstable, and, like the ‘beliefs’ looked at in Chapter One, vulnerable to the intrusion of ‘the Real’.

Lewis’s theory of laughter is based on the idea that all human existence, particularly in its bodily aspect, is absurd: ‘There is nothing that is animal (and we as bodies are animals) that is not absurd’ (‘Meaning’, 157). Lewis argues that in situations where there is a clear social or national distinction this absurdity is easily observable in others: ‘It is easy for us to see, if we are french, that the German is “absurd,” or if german, that the French is “ludicrous,” for we are *outside* in that case’ (‘Meaning’, 158). This sense of absurdity observed from the ‘*outside*’ remains, however, a partisan one

rather than the universal one which Lewis initially suggested with his reference to the general absurdity of the human body. Lewis argues that a sense of universal and indiscriminating absurdity is possible, although it is not so easy:

What is far more difficult to appreciate, with any constancy, is that, whatever his relative social advantages or particular national virtues may be, every man is profoundly open to the same criticism or ridicule from any opponent who is only different enough. Again, it is comparatively easy to see that another man, as an animal, is absurd; but it is far more difficult to observe oneself in that hard and exquisite light. But no man has ever continued to live who has observed himself in that manner for longer than a flash. Such consciousness must be of the nature of a thunderbolt. Laughter is only summer-lightning. But it occasionally takes on the dangerous form of absolute revelation.

This fundamental self-observation, then, can never on the whole be absolute. We are not constructed to be *absolute observers*. ('Meaning', 158)

The move here from viewing others as absurd to the possibility of viewing oneself in the same 'hard and exquisite light' demonstrates how Lewis saw absurdity as potentially universal. However, it is interesting that Lewis sees 'absolute revelation' of one's own absurdity as 'dangerous' and even lethal, as this insistence resonates with his claim in *Time and Western Man*, examined in Chapter One, that:

we are surface-creatures only, and by nature are meant to be that only, if there is any meaning in nature. No metaphysician goes the whole length of departure from the surface-condition of mind – that fact is generally not noticed. For such departures result in self-destruction, just as though we hurled ourselves into space – into "mental-space," if you like, in this case. (*TWM*, 377)

In both cases 'observation' is seen as potentially destructive if it goes too far: 'self-observation' is considered incompatible with the sense of self. 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' is an interesting and significant essay as in it Lewis seems to be far less comfortable with maintaining an ungrounded surface 'reality' than he was in *Time and Western Man*: he argues that,

although 'self-observation' is lethal in its absolute form, 'Where it does not exist at all, men sink to the level of insects' ('Meaning', 158). The idea that some 'self-observation' is needed but not too much is a slight modification of the notion that 'the "truths" from beneath the surface contradict our values' (*TWM*, 377): Lewis now sees some but not too much knowledge of what is 'beneath the surface' as necessary to the maintenance of a sense of self. Both formulations, however, in the words of Žižek, are ones 'of refusing to go to the end, of "keeping up appearances"' which try to keep 'the Real' at a safe and manageable distance.¹⁷ 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', perhaps because it is nearer to his fiction than *Time and Western Man*, allows 'the Real' a little closer but still attempts to keep it safely repressed. Laughter is seen as a response to the approach of 'the Real' that occurs in 'self-observation', an idea also expressed in 'Inferior Religions' where Lewis writes that 'Laughter is the climax in the tragedy of seeing, hearing, and smelling self-consciously' ('Religions', 151).

The 'fundamental self-observation' which Lewis refers to is seen as lethal because it compels us to regard ourselves in the 'hard and exquisite light' in which we view others as absurd objects to be laughed at. In other words, the absolute self-observation which Lewis regards as impossible would break down the 'essential separation' of mind-body dualism as we would be forced to view ourselves as nothing more than an absurd and animal body. Lewis saw this reduction to the physical as essential to laughter, writing that the 'root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person' ('Meaning', 158). Absolute self-observation would do away with this illusion of personality altogether; however, limited 'observation' is necessary as the mind-body dualism which is axiomatic to Lewis's theory of the laughter depends on it, as it creates a distinction between the laugher and the laughed-at:

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p. 24.

The essential us, that is the laugher, is as distinct from the Wild Body as in the Upanishadic account of the souls returned from the paradise of the Moon, which, entering into plants, are yet distinct from them. Or to take the symbolic vedic figure of the two birds, the one watching and passive, the other enjoying its activity, we similarly have to postulate *two* creatures, one that never enters into life, but that travels about in a vessel to whose destiny it is momentarily attached. That is, of course, the laughing observer, and the other is the Wild Body. ('Meaning', 157)

In this passage the laugher and the laughed-at are presented as two distinct parts of the same individual, with the laughing mind 'momentarily attached' to 'the Wild Body', its vessel. In the story 'A Soldier of Humour', published in *The Wild Body*, the narrator, Kerr-Orr, considers himself to exist in that way:

This forked, strange-scented, blond-skinned gut-bag, with its two bright rolling marbles with which it sees, bull's eyes full of mockery and madness, is my stalking horse. I hang somewhere in its midst operating it with detachment.¹⁸

Where exactly this 'I' hangs is open to question, but it is significant that it has a physical location at all, as this suggests, again, that Lewis's dualism is not completely pure and watertight: the non-physical has a physical location. This passage is reminiscent of the fight in *Enemy of the Stars* where 'Soul perched like aviator in basin of skull' (*ES*, 110). In the light of the ideas explored in Chapter One, it is interesting to note that Žižek argues that:

The role of fantasy is [...] in a way analogous to that of the ill-fated pineal gland in Descartes's philosophy, this mediator between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*: fantasy mediates between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality – that is to say, it provides a "schema" according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire,

¹⁸ Wyndham Lewis, 'A Soldier of Humour', first published 1927, in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. Bernard Lafourcade, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), p. 18.

filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure.¹⁹

Kerr-Orr's 'I', which is of the mind but located within the body, shares this quality of fantasy: the belief in its existence allows the 'schema' of an 'essential separation' between laugher and laughed-at to be postulated, and this separation to be denied in others and the absurdity of their pretence that they have minds to be laughed at. Whether or not 'desire' as such is involved, Kerr-Orr's fantasy of selfhood, and the sense of separation from others that it allows, certainly provides a 'schema' according to which other people can be seen as positive objects which can function as objects of laughter.²⁰ This laughing 'I', separate from but enclosed within 'the Wild Body', appears to be completely self-positing: constituted by the laughter it enables, it seems to have no independent existence of its own. Laughter creates the ground on which the laugher's identity is said to be based. In 'Inferior Religions' Lewis hints that the figure of the laugher is a projection who must be imagined rather than simply existing:

To introduce my puppets, and the Wild Body, the generic puppet of all, I must project a fanciful wandering figure to be the showman to whom the antics and solemn gambols of these wild children are to be a source of strange delight. ('Religions', 149)

This 'fanciful' figure is able to laugh at the mainly Breton characters satirised in the Wild Body stories because he is able to see that the 'fascinating imbecility of the creaking men machines' is 'the spectacle of a pattern as circumscribed and complete as a theorem of Euclid' ('Religions', 149). He can do this, because he can see that what they see as 'the normal real' is a product of 'a savage worship', the 'Inferior Religions' of the essay's title ('Religions', 149). Using the terminology of Chapter One, Kerr-Orr can

¹⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, (London & New York: Verso, 1997), p. 7

²⁰ Kerr-Orr positions himself with an antagonistic comparison with Freud: 'Freud explains everything by sex: I explain everything by *laughter*', 'A Soldier of Humour', p. 18.

perceive the 'beliefs' on which the 'reality' of the subjects of these stories is grounded; the 'beliefs' by which they are able to think of themselves as 'persons' rather than 'things'. Kerr-Orr is able to perceive the subjects of the stories as 'puppets', 'creaking men machines' and 'intricately moving bobbins', all terms which suggest mindless thingness rather than conscious personality. Lewis's 'fanciful wandering figure' understands that 'things' determine the behaviour of the 'persons' attached to them:

The boat's tackle and dirty little shell, or the hotel and its technique of hospitality, keeping the limbs of the men and women involved in a monotonous rhythm from morning to night, that was the occupational background [...]. ('Religions', 149)

This 'monotonous rhythm' alters the sense of reality of the men and women involved in it:

A man is made drunk with his boat or restaurant as he is with a merry-go-round: only it is the staid, everyday drunkenness of the normal real, not easy always to detect. We can all see the ascendance a "carousal" has on men, driving them into a set narrow intoxication. The wheel at Carisbrooke imposes a set of movements upon the donkey inside it, in drawing water from the well, that it is easy to grasp. But in the case of the hotel or fishing-boat, for instance, the complexity of the rhythmic scheme is so great that it passes as open and untrammelled life. This subtle and wiser mechanism merges, for the spectator, into the general variety of nature. ('Religions', 149)

Lewis's laughing observer is able, apparently, to succeed in the difficult task of perceiving the complex 'rhythmic scheme' at work under the 'everyday drunkenness of the normal real' and can see that 'we have in most lives the spectacle of a pattern as circumscribed and complete as a theorem of Euclid' ('Religions', 149). The laughter is able, in other words, to perceive 'the Real' of the thing under the quixotic 'reality' of the person.

The distinction between 'persons' and 'things' is a key one in Lewis's comic theory, and is, as many critics have observed, an inversion of Henri Bergson's philosophy of laughter. According to Bergson's philosophy 'We

laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing'²¹; Lewis, on the other hand, argues that "The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person' ('Meaning', 158). For Bergson, laughter functions as a corrective which prevents the mechanisation of the vital and spontaneous life of the soul:

The rigid, the ready-made, the mechanical, in contrast with the supple, the ever-changing and the living, absentmindedness in contrast with attention, in a word, automatism in contrast with free activity, such are the defects that laughter singles out and would fain correct.²²

Lewis's idea of laughter does not seek to do this, rather it serves to remind us of our essential absurdity and unfreedom, a condition he sees as inherent in our bodily existence:

all men are necessarily comic: for they are all *things*, or physical bodies, behaving as *persons*. It is only when you come to deny that they are "persons," or that there is any "mind" or "person" there at all, that the world of appearance is accepted as quite natural, and not at all ridiculous. Then, with a denial of "the person," life immediately becomes both "real" and very serious. ('Meaning', 158)

This 'denial of "the person"' is antithetical to Bergson's idea of the function of the comic, which seeks to save the person from becoming a thing: Bergson's idea of laughter can be seen as a defence against reification; Lewis's as an attack against the denial of the "real" and very serious' reified condition of humanity.

The opposition between Bergson and Lewis can also be seen in the way they relate laughter to the idea of the human. Bergson argues that 'the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly *human*' and that laughter is one of the defining features of humanity:

²¹ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton & Fred Rothwell, (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 58.

²² Bergson, *Laughter*, p. 130.

Several [philosophers] have defined man as “an animal which laughs.” They might as well have defined him as an animal which is laughed at; for if any other animal, or some lifeless object, produces the same effect, it is always because of some resemblance to man, of the stamp he gives it or the use he puts it to.²³

For Lewis, laughter does not have this humanising aspect, but rather breaks down any idea of the exceptional status of the human and its perceived separation from the rest of the natural world:

To bring vividly to our mind what we mean by “absurd,” let us turn to the plant, and enquire how the plant could be absurd. Suppose you came upon an orchid or a cabbage reading Flaubert’s *Salammbô*, or Plutarch’s *Moralia*, you would be very much surprised. But if you found a man or a woman reading it, you would *not* be surprised.

Now in one sense you ought to have been just as much surprised at finding a man occupied in this way as if you had found an orchid or a cabbage, or a tom-cat, to include the animal world. There is the same physical anomaly. It is just as absurd externally, that is what I mean. – The deepest root of the Comic is to be sought in this anomaly. (‘Meaning’, 158-9)

The identity which Lewis posits between men and cabbages and tom-cats is based on an idea of matter and the material, which he sees as fundamental to everything that exists and which he opposes to an idea of the mind, which is here seen as an ‘anomaly’. In the mind-matter dualism Lewis presents in ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’, matter is the primary quality, mind being portrayed as an absurd and pretentious supplement to it:

The movement or intelligent behaviour of matter, any autonomous movement of matter, is essentially comic. That is what we mean by comic or ludicrous. And we all, as human beings, answer to that description. We are all autonomously and intelligently moving matter. (‘Meaning’, 159)

²³ Bergson, *Laughter*, pp. 3-4.

According to Lewis's argument human life is entirely comic and should continuously provoke laughter, something which it manifestly does not do. The reason for this absence of laughter is the 'belief' in mind, which enables us to construct a 'reality' which represses the comedy of 'the Real':

The reason why we do not laugh when we observe a man reading a newspaper or trimming a lamp, or smoking a pipe, is because we suppose he "has a mind," as we call it, because we are accustomed to this strange sight, and because we do it ourselves. But because when you see a man walking down the street you know why he is doing that (for instance, because he is on his way to lunch, just as the stone rolling down the hillside, you say, is responding to the law of gravitation), that does not make him less ridiculous. But there is nothing essentially ridiculous about the stone. The man is ridiculous fundamentally, he is ridiculous *because he is a man*, instead of a thing. ('Meaning', 159)

It is because 'we suppose' that men, unlike stones, have minds that they can be seen as ridiculous: the same 'belief' which represses laughter also causes it, as this 'belief' posits the split between 'person' and 'thing', the failure of which is the root of the comic. The 'belief' in dualism denies the ultimate thingness of the person, but in so doing makes the things that it believes to be persons absurd as it claims that these things are not just simply things but are in fact persons which, in 'the Real', they are not.

A dualism of mind and matter is also essential to Bergson's theory of the comic, only for him the mind, or soul, is presented as the primary and motivating force, and matter as an impediment to its noble efforts:

in every human form [we see] the effort of a soul which is shaping matter, a soul which is infinitely supple and perpetually in motion, subject to no law of gravitation, for it is not the earth that attracts it. This soul imparts a portion of its winged lightness to the body it animates: the immateriality which thus passes into matter is what is called gracefulness. Matter, however, is obstinate and resists. It draws itself to the ever-alert activity of this higher principle, would fain convert it to its own inertia and cause it to revert to mere automatism. It would fain immobilise the intelligently varied movements of the body in stupidly contracted grooves, stereotype in permanent grimaces the fleeting expressions of the face, in short imprint on the whole person such an attitude as to make it appear

immersed and absorbed in the materiality of some mechanical occupation, instead of ceaselessly renewing its vitality by keeping in touch with a living ideal. Where matter thus succeeds in dulling the outward life of the soul, in petrifying its movements and thwarting its gracefulness, it achieves, at the expense of the body, an effect that is comic.²⁴

For Bergson, laughter is on the side of the 'soul' against 'matter', and it enables the 'soul' to laugh at 'matter' and so free itself from the laws of matter. In Lewis's theory, on the other hand, the object of laughter is inverted, and is directed against the 'mind' which pretends to be separate from matter. The difference between Lewis's and Bergson's theories of the comic indicates two divergent views of human existence, which, though both relying on the same basic dualism, are diametrically opposed to each other. Both depend on a central idea of unmasking, or going behind appearance and exposing something more essential, with Bergson attempting to expose the soul behind matter and Lewis exposing the absurd thingness behind the facade of the person and the 'belief' in mind. Using the terminology developed in Chapter One, Lewis's idea of the comic exposes the thingness of 'the Real' behind our everyday 'reality' in which we quixotically believe ourselves to be 'persons'. As we saw, in *Time and Western Man*, published in the same year as *The Wild Body*, Lewis set himself against the exposure of 'the Real' and defended the 'keeping up' of the appearance of the 'reality' of the personality, writing that:

our only terra firma in a boiling and shifting world is, after all, our "self." That must cohere for us to be capable at all of behaving in any way but as mirror-images of alien realities, or as the most helpless and lowest organisms, as worms or as sponges. (*TWM*, 131-2)

In his theory of the comic, with its assumption of a fundamental identity between men and cabbages, Lewis seems to be at odds with his argument in *Time and Western Man*. In the terms of 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' any sense of 'our "self"' would appear to be 'absurd', as it entails 'a *thing*

²⁴ Bergson, *Laughter*, pp. 28-9.

behaving like a person' and not like one of 'the most helpless and lowest organisms' to which we mistakenly and comically believe ourselves to be superior. It would be wrong, however, to view the two texts as completely opposed to each other, for, as we have seen, in 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' Lewis portrays laughter as a force destructive of the personality, and in its absolute form humanly unsustainable, insisting that 'We are not constructed to be *absolute observers*' ('Meaning', 158). Such observation is presumably destructive as it not only reveals other 'persons' to the 'things' but also reveals the 'person' laughing as a 'thing' as well. Laughter is directed against the absurd bodily aspect of others, but as the laugher has a body themselves absolute observation will reveal them to be just as absurd as everybody else, and so in a less secure position from which to laugh at them. The fact that laughter itself is a physical act, one which no doubt looks absurd when observed from an absolute viewpoint, also works against the assumed separation of the laugher from the laughed-at.

In 'Inferior Religions' the physical aspect and implicit commonality of laughter is openly acknowledged, and is no longer so unequivocally directed against the Wild Body. Indeed, in this essay, laughter is presented as something which breaks down the mind-body dualism, which, in 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' was its 'essential' precondition. Two of the attributes of laughter that Lewis catalogues are of particular interest in this context: 'Laughter is the Wild Body's song of triumph. [...] Laughter is the mind sneezing' ('Religions', 151). Here, laughter is seen as both of the body and of the mind, and significantly its mental aspect is characterised using a physical metaphor – the automatic reflex of the sneeze. Lewis's definition of the Wild Body in 'Inferior Religions' is subtly different to that in 'The Meaning of the Wild Body':

The Wild Body, as understood here, is that small primitive, literally antediluvian vessel in which we set out on our adventures. Or regarded as a brain, it is rather a winged magic horse, that transports us hither and thither, sometimes rushing as in the chinese cosmogonies, up and down the outer reaches of space. Laughter is the brain-body's snort of exultation. It expresses its wild sensation of power and speed; it is all that remains physical in the flash of

thought, its friction: or it may be a defiance flung at the hurrying fates.

The Wild Body is this supreme survival that is us, the stark apparatus with its set of mysterious spasms: the most profound of which is laughter. ('Religions', 152)

The first sentence of this passage presents a vision of the Wild Body similar to that given in 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' of it as 'a vessel to whose destiny [the laughter] is momentarily attached' and to Kerr-Orr's 'stalking horse' in 'The Soldier of Humour'. However, in the second sentence the Wild Body is 'regarded as a brain', which breaks down the 'essential separation' assumed in the other essay. The introduction of the figure of the 'brain-body' in the third sentence seems to compound this breakdown, with what were seen as separate now integrated into a single, though hyphenated, identity. This conflation of the mental and the physical is exemplified by Lewis's claim that laughter 'is all that remains physical in the flash of thought'.

Even in 'The Meaning of the Wild Body', however, there are hints of the breakdown of mind-body dualism. For example, Lewis writes that 'in certain forms of laughter, we leap' over 'the chasm lying between being and non-being over which it is impossible for logic to throw any bridge' ('Meaning', 157). Laughter seems to function in a way similar to that of violence in *Enemy of the Stars* where 'Thoughts fell on [Arghol] like punches', a phenomenon in which mind and body are confused but not fully integrated.

In Lewis's theory of the comic, as set out in 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' the assumed but unargued dualism is problematic: it is essential in that it establishes the distinction between laugher and laughed-at; but what the laugher laughs at is precisely the deluded pretence of the possession of such a dualism in the laughed-at. The dualism is not so much an ontological and universal one, in which the human subject is fundamentally split, but more of a social one, in which there is a distinction between those who are able to become comic observers, and those who are not, and so provide comic fodder for the eyes of the

laughers. As we will see in Chapters Four and Five, this pattern is also present in Lewis's attitudes towards race and gender.

Men Without Art:

‘The terms are strictly unusable’

In *Men Without Art* Lewis uses the language of dualism to articulate a theory of satire, which both continues and develops ideas about ‘persons’ and ‘things’ found in *The Wild Body* essays, and deploys dualistic terminology to construct a distinction between his aesthetic and those of other writers. Lewis also argues against other people’s dualistic categorisation of art and literature, finding fault with Virginia Woolf’s division of writers into materialist realists and non-materialist modernists, and T. E. Hulme’s sharp distinction between romanticism and classicism.

Lewis’s theory of satire is developed in part as a response to William Hazlitt’s criticism of characterisation in the plays of Ben Jonson which Hazlitt sees as not ‘human’ enough. Hazlitt writes:

Shakespeare’s characters are men; Ben Jonson’s are more like machines, governed by mere routine, or by the convenience of the poet, whose property they are. In reading the one, we are let into the minds of his characters, we see the play of their thoughts, how their humours flow and work. . . . His humour (so to speak) bubbles, sparkles, and finds its way in all directions, like a natural spring, In Ben Jonson it is, as it were, confined in a leaden cistern, where it stagnates and corrupts; or directed only through certain artificial pipes and conduits to answer a given purpose. . . . Sheer ignorance, bare-faced impudence, or idiot imbecility, are his dramatic commonplaces – things that provoke pity or disgust, instead of laughter. (quoted in *MWA*, 91)

Lewis is far more comfortable than Hazlitt in laughing at ‘ignorance’, ‘impudence’, and ‘idiot imbecility’, and sees Hazlitt’s discomfort as rooted in an ‘ethical’ concern with humanity. The reason why Hazlitt believes that ‘idiot imbecility’ should not provoke laughter is, Lewis speculates, because such characteristics ‘being found in a human being, it is “letting down” [of] the species, and so to laugh at it would be unethical and *inhuman*’ (*MWA*,

91). In contradiction to Hazlitt, Lewis embraces the idea of an ‘unethical and *inhuman*’ laughter:

Perfect laughter, if there could be such a thing, would be inhuman. And it would select as the objects of its mirth as much the antics dependent upon pathological maladjustments, injury, or disease, as the antics of clumsy and imperfectly functioning healthy people. (MWA, 92)

Lewis defends laughter directed at people’s physical appearance, claiming that ‘Infinitely more pain is inflicted by laughter provoked by some non-physical cause than by that provoked by the physical’ (MWA, 92). Lewis’s account of an inhuman and perfect laughter is not, however, the end of the matter: ‘Our deepest laughter is not, however, inhuman laughter. And yet it is non-personal and non-moral’ (MWA, 92). ‘Our deepest laughter’ does not achieve the status of ‘*Perfect laughter*’, much in the same way as Lewis claimed in *Time and Western Man* that ‘No metaphysician goes the whole length of departure from the surface-condition of mind’ (TWM, 377). In both cases the attainment of the absolute, in either its metaphysical or comic form, is denied to humanity.

And just as the metaphysician, in *Time and Western Man*, must remain on the surface, so, in *Men Without Art*, must the satirist: Lewis defines satire as an art of the external, in contrast to Hazlitt’s preference for an art which lets the reader ‘into the minds of the characters’, the ‘method’ which, Lewis writes, is ‘least suited to satire’ which on the contrary ‘must deal with the *outside*’ (MWA, 95). Lewis scorns Hazlitt’s dislike of the mechanical nature of Ben Jonson’s characters, dismissing it in terms familiar from *The Wild Body* essays:

“Shakespeare’s characters are men: Ben Jonson’s are more like machines,” Hazlitt exclaims. And I have replied – “Of course they are! – in both cases that is just what they were intended to be.” But “men” are undoubtedly, to a greater or lesser extent, machines. And there are those among us who are revolted by this reflection, and there are those that are not. Men are sometimes so palpably

machines, the machination is so transparent, that they are *comic*, as we say. (MWA, 95)

As in *The Wild Body* it is the art of exposing the hidden thingness of the person that is seen as comic. Lewis develops this argument in *Men Without Art*, introducing into the argument the concept of freedom and presenting laughter as a reaction to the recognition of its illusory nature:

our consciousness is pitched up to the very moderate altitude of relative independence at which we live – at which level we have the illusion of being autonomous and “free.” But if one of us exposes too much his “works,” and we start seeing him as a *thing*, then – in subconsciously referring this back to ourselves – we are astonished and shocked, and we bark at him – we *laugh* – in order to relieve our emotion. (MWA, 95)

The perception of the commonality between laugher and laughed-at which was seen as lethal in *The Wild Body* is here seen as fundamental to laughter: it is the recognition that the laugher shares the unfreedom of the laughed-at that provokes laughter. In *The Wild Body* laughter was presented as a response to the unfreedom of others; here it functions as a relief from the recognition that this unfreedom can be referred back to the laugher: laughter does not create distinction but helps relieve the realisation of its absence. The ‘essential separation’ between laugher and laughed-at that was assumed but not argued in ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’ can no longer be sustained. Lewis does, however, resort to another distinction which creates another ‘essential separation’:

Freedom is certainly our human goal, in the sense that all effort is directed to that end: and it is a dictate of nature that we should laugh, and laugh loudly, at those who have fallen into slavery, and still more, those who batten on it. But the artistic sensibility, that is *another* “provision of nature.” The artist steps outside this evolutionary upward march, and looking back into the evolutionary machine, he explores its pattern – or is supposed to – quite cold-bloodedly. (MWA, 95-6)

Human nature is seen as split between the ‘dictate [...] that we should laugh’ and the ‘artistic sensibility’, with the artist presented as being able to achieve the separation from the general condition of humanity that the laughter was in ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’. In arguing for this ‘cold-blooded’ view of the artist Lewis refers to his claim in *Time and Western Man* that his was ‘a philosophy of the eye’ (*TWM*, 392) – a claim that will be examined in detail in the Conclusion – and his satirical mode of representation in *The Apes of God*, claiming of the latter that ‘no book has ever been written that has paid more attention to the *outside* of people’ (*MWA*, 97). What is of interest here, however, is the way in which Lewis seeks to distinguish and separate what he calls his ‘*externalist art*’ from that of other writers by the use of images of mind-body dualism.

Lewis’s attack on the art of the inside places him in opposition to a dominant strand in modernism, which sought to portray internal consciousness rather than external physicality. For Lewis, this type of writing is represented best by Virginia Woolf, and he attacks Woolf’s idea of fiction in a chapter subtitled “‘Mind” and “Matter” on the Plane of a Literary Controversy’. He begins his argument with a sceptical reflection on the terms of mind-body dualism:

Body and Mind [...] are, philosophically, two very shadowy counters. There are, on the market today, patterns of belief extending for the extreme position, on the one hand, that there is in fact no traceable psyche, but only one stuff, out of which our world is composed, properly neither “matter” nor “mind”; to the extreme position on the other, which, as a matter of fact, is much the same as the former, only with a more strongly marked subjective flavouring. The single basic stuff is more soulful at that end that it is at the other, the deterministic end, that is all. (*MWA*, 131)

Lewis’s insistence on the deep similarity between the philosophical poles he sets out here serves to belittle both of them, as does his use of the term ‘single basic stuff’, which is hardly a standard philosophical phrase. This belittlement allows Lewis to remain, theoretically at least, neutral in the discussion that follows, in which he offers a mocking critique of Woolf’s

attack on realism, as represented by Arnold Bennett, in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1924). Lewis characterises the 'conflict' between the two writers in a caricaturised fashion:

Mrs. Woolf, the orthodox "idealist," tremulously squares up to the big beefy brute, Bennett, plainly the very embodiment of commonplace *matter* – it is, in fact, a rather childish, that is to say an over-simple, encounter. It is a cat and dog match, right enough: but such "spiritual" values as those invoked upon Mrs. Woolf's side of the argument, are of a spiritualism which only exists upon the popular plane, as the complement of hard-and-fast matter. The one value is as tangible, popular and readily understood by the "plain reader" as the other. I doubt if, at bottom, it is very much more than a boy and girl quarrel (to change the metaphor from dog-and-cat). I believe it is just the incompatibility of the eternal feminine, on the one hand, and the rough footballing "he" principle – the eternal masculine – on the other. There is nothing more metaphysical about it than that. (*MWA*, 133)

Lewis's dismissal of this 'conflict' as nothing more 'metaphysical' than a 'boy and girl quarrel' both belittles it, and implicitly invokes his own position as a superior one, and translates the opposition mind-matter into gendered terms. I will leave a detailed consideration of Lewis's views on gender to Chapter Three, however it is interesting to note that in his comparison masculinity is associated with the body and the feminine with the mind, as well as that his subsequent suggestion that there is a deep similarity between the characters of Woolf and Bennett undermines the clarity of any straightforward gender opposition:

The preoccupations of Mrs. Dalloway are after all not so far removed from the interests of Mr. Bennett's characters. One is somewhat nearer to "the Palace," the other to the "Pub." But does that not even suggest a subtle kinship, rather than an irreconcilable foreignness? (*MWA*, 133)

As we will see, this idea of a 'subtle kinship' is one that has many resonances with Lewis's thinking about gender, as well as with the spectre of fundamental commonality that is present in *Enemy of the Stars* and *The*

Childermass. In the present context, this idea demonstrates again Lewis's tendency to undermine his binary oppositions almost as soon as he introduces them, as well as revealing a certain scepticism on his part about the 'newness' of the modernism that Woolf sought to valorise against the 'old' realism of Bennett and other British realist writers. In his attack on Henry James, Lewis expressed an explicit preference for the eye of the body over the eye of the mind (*MWA*, 120), a preference which would associate him, in Woolf's terms, with the 'materialist' and outmoded realism of Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells, rather than her idea of a non-materialist modernism. It is worth mentioning that the opposition mind-body is used by Woolf in her essay with in a far less guarded and self-aware way than by Lewis: indeed, in a passage quoted by Lewis, she writes that:

If we tried to formulate our meaning in one word we should say that these three writers [Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy] are materialists. It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with body that they have disappointed us [...]. (*MWA*, 133)

Lewis's response to this spirit-oriented modernism is twofold: he belittles the opposition used to define it; and he invokes a body-oriented vision of satire to counter it. This twofold response is, however, not a fully consistent one, as it seeks both to invert the opposition (with body taking precedence over mind) and to do away with it altogether (by dismissing it as nothing more 'metaphysical' than a 'boy and girl quarrel'). Lewis's claim that '*Body* and *Mind* [...] are, philosophically, two very shadowy counters' is one which applies to his own work as much as to that which he would criticise.

In his discussion of the difference between the 'classic' and the 'romantic' Lewis also has draws on images of mind-body dualism. Lewis, following H. J. C. Grierson's work on Romanticism, asserts that "The 'destruction of the flesh in order to exalt the spirit' was a characteristic of the romantic mind' (*MWA*, 152). Following this assertion he attempts to characterise the difference between the romantic and the classical using the terms of mind-body dualism, albeit in a tentative and qualified way:

Would it be possible to say, I wonder, merely as a means of reaching some concrete understanding of these terms, that (without at all involving any religious issue) the term *classical* should stand *rather than not* for the body, and the term “romantic” stand *rather than not* for “the soul”? – Or instead of flesh and spirit, let us put concrete and physical (matter and mind) – rather in the way that the Roman Catholic religion is always described by the theosophist as “such a *material* religion” – “material” used in some such connotation as that? (*MWA*, 152-3)

The confusion of this passage – evident in the repetition of the awkward phrase ‘*rather than not*’ and the swift move from the ‘without at all involving any religious issue’ to ‘the Roman Catholic religion’ – suggests that here, as in ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’, ‘the dichotomy of mind and body’ can be assumed but not fully argued, and again takes the form of an apparently self-evident yet ungrounded axiom. In the sentence that follows Lewis does little to ground his assumption: ‘At all events, I always think of something very *solid*, and I believe it is a sensation I share with many people, when the term “*classic*” is employed, and of something very dishevelled, ethereal and misty, when the term “romantic” is made use of (*MWA*, 153). Lewis’s argument here is not based on reason, but (ironically given his attack on and definition of romanticism) on belief: belief in what he ‘always thinks’ and what he believes to be the ‘sensations’ of others.

Lewis returns to the distinction between mind and body later in his argument:

The “classical” has a physiognomy of sorts, then: it has a solid aspect rather than a gaseous: it is liable to incline rather to the side of Aristotle than to the side of Plato: to be of a public rather than of a private character: to be objective rather than subjective: to incline to action rather than to dream: to belong to the sensuous side rather than to the ascetic: to be redolent of common sense rather than of metaphysic: to be universal rather than idiomatic: to lean upon the intellect rather than upon the bowels and the nerves. (*MWA*, 155)

At the start of this sentence the ‘classical’ is still associated with bodily qualities: it has a ‘physiognomy’, is ‘solid’, ‘objective’, active and ‘sensuous’.

However, by the end of the sentence the dualism has been reversed: the 'classic' 'lean[s] upon the intellect' and the 'romantic' is now associated with the body, represented by 'the bowels and the nerves'. This reversal makes a dualistic opposition between the 'classic' and the 'romantic' less clear cut than it had been. Lewis is aware of the problematic nature of this dualism, as his discussion of T. E. Hulme's essay 'Romanticism and Classicism' makes clear. Lewis turns to Hulme after finding the definitions proposed by Brunetière inadequate and confused: 'Do not let us despair of the terms "classic" and "romantic," however, till we have gone back for enlightenment to Mr. T. E. Hulme' (*MWA*, 162). However, after examining Hulme's ideas in detail, Lewis does end up despairing:

So the moment we get down to brass tacks, in the matter of these terms classic and romantic, even with such an intelligent critic as Hulme, back we are once more, upon the instant, among the confusions à la Brunetière. There is no avoiding that, it seems. The terms are strictly unusable. (*MWA*, 164)

Lewis identifies the reason for the obsolescence of these terms as historical:

"Romantic" and "classical" are terms applicable only to a historical see-saw of influences in our formerly watertight Western World. And during this century we have slowly but surely left this world behind, in the sense that it is no longer necessary or possible to refer everything that happens to its narrowly-contrasted pagan and Christian – religious and secular – values. (*MWA*, 165)

In this historical situation, Lewis argues, the use of these terms becomes a matter of farcical masquerade:

Just as [...] we are, undoubtedly, on all hands slipping back into the old narrowly European grooves, under the straitening pressures of the Slump, into economic and political nationalism: and, in the bosom of nationalism, into the old Tory-Whig, Catholic and Protestant antagonisms: so we are bandying about these words "classical" and "romantic." But it is all extremely artificial – as artificial, for instance, as the Erse names in which the Irish at present

masquerade. Soon we shall all be expected to yodel in middle English, and then the man of the Danegelt will be incomprehensible to the man of the Saxon-south. All these things hang together – it is the end of history, and the beginning of historical pageant and play. (MWA, 165)

The terms ‘classical’ and ‘romantic’, Lewis argues, offer the same sort of ersatz authenticity as nationalism, and are just as inappropriate to the historical situation. Perhaps Lewis would argue, as he does about Liberalism in *Left Wings Over Europe*, that in using this dualism ‘we think we have one set of people before us, whereas in fact we have quite a different set’.²⁵ Dualism, like Liberalism, is presented as a ‘belief’ inadequate to ‘the Real’ it attempts to mediate. It is significant that Lewis here sees theoretical or philosophical thought as limited by historical conditions, as this suggests that the social has primacy over the intellectual. In my interpretation of *Enemy of the Stars* I argued that Arghol’s philosophy was best understood as a response to a social situation rather than as pure metaphysics, and Lewis’s later critique of another dualism supports my argument. Lewis’s dualism in general is best understood in such a way – as a ‘belief’ which tries to make sense of a particular historical situation. Lewis’s dualism attempts to establish a separation of the intellectual from the world, and in so doing to establish his freedom. But this separation is never portrayed as fully achieved and the repressed mechanical unfreedom of the ‘thing’ upsets the assumed freedom of the ‘person’, provoking laughter. Lewis writes that ‘the humble message’ of *Men Without Art* is that ‘we are all compelled, to some extent, to enter into the spirit of the comedy’ (MWA, 165) and in Lewis’s work it is this enforced and inescapable laughter, associated with the absurdity of the human body, which triumphs over the immaterial aspirations of the intellect.

²⁵ Wyndham Lewis, *Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), p. 316.

Chapter Three: Gender

Wyndham Lewis has often been seen as an essentially masculine writer and artist, whose preference for the external over the internal, the hard over the soft, and linear clarity over impressionistic smudging, are symptoms of an antipathy to feminine elements in fiction and art.¹ While there is much in the view of Lewis as a masculinist figure that is undeniable, such an approach tends to ignore Lewis's complex, even sophisticated anxieties about masculinity, and in so doing reinforces an image of Lewis that plays along with some of the excesses of his rhetoric rather than exposing the internal inconsistencies of his arguments. Critical appraisals of Lewis as unproblematically masculine which ignore Lewis's anxieties about gender deny themselves the possibility of enquiring into their historical basis. In this chapter I will examine Lewis's attitudes to gender in detail, focusing particularly on his ideas about masculinity. I will look first at his theoretical speculations on gender in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), and then read his fiction produced during the First World War – both short stories and the novel *Tarr* (1918) – in the light shed by the examination of the later work. Lewis's thinking on gender shares features and concerns with his thinking on other topics, and by examining these ideas and stories in detail I will not only reach a better understanding of Lewis's attitudes to the masculine and the feminine, but will also contribute to a fuller interpretation of his anxieties about the individual and society, the mind and the body, and the artist and crowd – indeed those anxieties than motivate and shape his work in its entirety.

¹ See, for example, Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Jellyfish and Treacle: Lewis, Joyce, Gender and Modernism' in Beja Morris & Shari Benstock (eds.), *Coping With Joyce: Essays from the Copenhagen Symposium*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989).

The Art of Being Ruled:

‘the male is not naturally “a man”’

Although *The Art of Being Ruled* is not specifically a book about gender there is much in it concerned with issues of gender difference and the nature of the masculine and the feminine, and I will explore sections of the book in which these issues are foregrounded. It is worth noting, before I begin my detailed analysis, that ideas about and images of gender do not remain neatly compartmentalised in this book. Indeed, Lewis explicitly connects them to his other concerns:

How the sex war links up with the class war, the age war, and the war of the high and the low-brow, is as follows. “The prevalent dominance of men” is a phrase used commonly. Man in himself is a symbol of authority. *Masculinity* [...] is in itself authoritative and hence arbitrary. The most miserable and feeble specimen of the male “class” is in that paradoxical position of representing the most devilish despotism and symbolizing brute force. He suffers from the accident that he symbolizes “authority” in an era of change and militant revolutionary revaluation. (*ABR*, 194)

This linking of masculinity and authority is hardly original, but it is significant as it indicates that Lewis’s anxieties about masculinity are linked to anxieties about authority in general. As I will argue later, Lewis sees ‘the Real’ of femininity working against the ‘reality’ of masculinity, and indeed against clear cut gender difference altogether. In light of this tendency, statements like the following, which may appear straightforward, gain new significance:

This division into rulers and ruled partakes of a sexual division; or rather, the contrast between the one class and the other is more like that between the sexes than anything else. The ruled are the females and the rulers the males, in this arrangement. (*ABR*, 92)

As we will see in this chapter, in Lewis's work the idea of masculinity proves to be a shaky ground for the idea of a distinct and naturally superior ruling class.

Lewis argues that gender difference is not an underlying human reality, shaped by nature and so preceding and unaltered by transient cultural phenomena such as fashion, but is itself a superficial phenomenon:

A very great superficial difference still exists between women and men. As you see women walking about the streets they are (as far as possible) luxuriously and exquisitely dressed, very neat, as far as possible "chaque ceveu à sa place"; their clothes are chosen as far as possible of flimsy and seductive material: they are still, in short, more ornamental, silken, frail, treated with cosmetics, and sedulously trimmed than are men. The sex specialization is with them the nature of an obsession, therefore, to that extent, in the sense that they still think of themselves more as "women" than men think first and foremost of themselves as "men." They get themselves up so that they shall be graceful and seductive. But the mind of the woman, stripped of this secondary equipment of grace and feminineness, is not, as almost everyone will admit, very different to that of the man.

When speaking of "women," then, as we must sometimes do, it is naturally of this artificial, secondary creature – *not* of a platonic androgyne, of a naked soul, or of the violent or gentle, charming or offensive creature that you know as Rose or Mary to be at the heart of her specialization. (*ABR*, 185-6)

The treatment here of 'feminineness' as a piece of 'secondary equipment' is interesting, as it suggests that in Lewis's eyes gender is more social than natural; or, using the terminology introduced in Chapter One, that it is on the side of 'reality' rather than 'the Real'. The idea that gender difference is part of social 'reality' rather than 'the Real' of nature seems to distance Lewis from many of his male modernist contemporaries, for whom gender difference represented a deeper and more permanent reality than that offered by modern society.

Lewis's argument that gender difference is a product of 'secondary equipment' would seem to suggest, following some of the ideas about dualism discussed in Chapter Two, that he saw it more as a phenomenon

of the mind than of the body, and this idea is present in *The Art of Being Ruled*. However, Lewis's placement of gender difference in the realm of the mind seems to serve to denigrate the body, and perhaps particularly the female body, rather than to enable an escape from rigid naturalistic ways of thinking about gender.

To illustrate the consequences of a disincarnate view of gender difference Lewis uses the fictional example of a bridegroom who finds out on his wedding night that his bride is not a virgin. According to Lewis, most people think that this 'deception' occurs 'on the *physical* plane', a belief that he claims is wrong (*ABR*, 211). The unimportance of 'the *physical* plane' can be seen, Lewis argues, if we consider the bridegroom's reactions to the possible circumstances in which his bride has lost her virginity:

Suppose, for instance, that the disappointed bridegroom learns that, instead of being deflowered in the course of a love intrigue, his bride has been deflowered against her will on a lonely road by a tramp. Then the situation changes for him at once. There is a flood of bitter tears on the part of the bride; he folds her in his arms and all is well. *For it is not the physical fact that has disturbed his repose of mind.* It is the person, *she*, gazing at him out of her lovely, *personal* eyes, that it has caused him such a disagreeable shock to find he was not the first with. (*ABR*, 211)

The assertion that this fictional bridegroom is more interested in his bride as a 'person' than as a '*physical fact*' could suggest that Lewis held a more enlightened view of relations between the sexes than is commonly believed; however, the distinction between the personal and the physical made here leads him to view the female body as a grotesque and irrelevant object, devoid of affect. Lewis goes on to argue that, in the case of this fictional rape:

The act of deflowering, it is true, occurred, technically, on the physical plane. But that – were there no *person* attached to it – would be of no more importance than something happening to an automaton: no more than the daily dirtying of the hands, which are washed and then they are clean again: no more than the figure in the

Bois, in Mallarmé's prose poem, observed embracing the earth. For it is a person, a mind, that he has married; incarnated and expressed, it is true, by a certain body. (*ABR*, 211)

It transpires that by asserting that men love women for their minds Lewis creates an image of the female body which has no emotional or psychological significance, and consequently belittles the importance of violence done against it: rape is now 'no more' than getting one's hands dirty, and just as reparable. The objectification of the (female) body necessitated by Lewis's distinction between the personal and the physical is made quite clear:

that body is, in a sense (in the things that happen to it, if that is possible, independently of the mind), as unimportant by itself as the materials by which it is surrounded – its clothes, the tables and chairs, dust on the road, or bricks of the house. Disconnect it from the *person*, if that may be, and it is *dead*. In short, the body outraged by the tramp would be a *corpse* only. The body enjoyed by an earlier lover would be *alive*. In the latter case it would be *she* – Daphne, Joan, or Elizabeth. It is the personality he is in touch with when he looks into her eyes (and not a bit of flesh – that is, as flesh, of the same impersonal order as a bit of cloth, a lump of clay, a sponge, a vegetable) that all the trouble is about. (*ABR*, 211-12)

The extreme split between the mind and the body proposed here can be viewed in terms of 'reality' and 'the Real', with 'the *person*' representing a 'reality' sustained by belief, and the body 'the Real' of inanimate and inhuman objects. When viewed in this light, femininity, and perhaps gender difference in general, can be seen to be a function of 'reality' rather than something fundamental to 'the Real'. The idea that love and sexuality are matters of a superficial and belief-sustained 'reality' and that the physical facts generally associated with these phenomena are actually disconnected from and irrelevant to them is consistent with Lewis's assertion in *Time and Western Man* that: 'We are surface-creatures, and the "truths" from beneath the surface contradict our values' (*TWM*, 377). The phrase 'surface-creatures' is also used in *The Art of Being Ruled*, significantly in the context of a discussion of Samuel Butler's idea that

‘there is no true love short of eating and consequent assimilation’, and that, in matters of love:

No merely superficial, temporary contact of exterior form to exterior form will serve us. The embrace must be consummate, not achieved by a mocking environment of draped and muffled arms that leaves no lasting taste on organization or consciousness, but by an enfolding within the bare and warm bosom of an open mouth – a grinding out of all differences of opinion by the sweet persuasion of the jaws, and the eloquence of a tongue that now convinces us all the more powerfully because it is inarticulate and deals but with one universal language of agglutination. Then we become made one with what we love – not heart to heart, but protoplasm to protoplasm, and this is far more to the purpose.²

Lewis adopts this statement as the complete antithesis of his own position, arguing against Butler’s notion of love as a matter of depth and incorporation:

Love, as we discursively understand it, can only exist on the surface. An inch beneath, and it is no longer love, but the abstract rage of hunger and reproduction of which the swallowing of the oyster, or the swallowing of the male by the female epira, is an illustration. And it is the spirit of the artist that maintains this superficiality, differentiation of existence, for us: our personal, our detached life, in short, in distinction to our crowd-life. (*ABR*, 232)

The qualifying phrase ‘as we discursively understand it’ is crucial here: Lewis is not arguing that love really exists only on the surface, but that it only has meaningful existence for us on the surface. In Lewis’s eyes, love can only possess ‘reality’ if the surface alone is considered and the depths beneath it ignored. Love, like the ‘difference [that] still exists between women and men’, is for Lewis something superficial, maintained over and above ‘the abstract rage’ that lurks ‘An inch beneath’. However, the idea that love is a matter of the incorporeal ‘person’ and not the physical ‘thing’

² Samuel Butler, *The Notebooks of Samuel Butler*, ed. Henry Festing Jones, first published 1912, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 205. Quoted in *The Art of Being Ruled*, p. 226.

suggests, particularly when considered in the light of Lewis's theory of the comic discussed in the previous chapter, that it is an illusion, and one which is in a precarious position. In *Men Without Art* Lewis wrote of how 'our consciousness is pitched up to the very moderate level of relative independence at which we live – at which level we have the illusion of being autonomous and "free"; love, as described by Lewis, would seem to exist on this superficial level as well, and so be equally vulnerable to being exposed as an illusion by the intrusion of underlying thingness (see Chapter Two and *MWA*, 95). The 'realities' of love, of the 'difference [that] still exists between women and men', and of freedom all depend on the successful repression of 'the Real' which lies under them, and exercise which, as shown in Chapter One, is prone to failure.

The structural similarity between love, gender difference, and freedom is interesting as freedom is one of the recurrent themes of *The Art of Being Ruled*. Lewis argues that the rise of modernity results in a general loss of individual freedom, and that most people are more-or-less happy with this as they find individual freedom in the old sense too onerous and unrewarding. Lewis does not present this situation as a simple move from general freedom to general unfreedom and servitude, but rather as the triumph of a particular concept of freedom, more obviously desirable for most of humanity, and which is practically indistinguishable from unfreedom, over another concept of freedom, which is desired only by certain individuals.

Lewis associates the birth of the modern conception with freedom with two of the defining events of modernity: the Industrial and French Revolutions. Lewis argues that the modern ideal of freedom and what he sees as the modern reality of unfreedom, exemplified by generalised mechanisation, had a reciprocal relationship, in which the concept of freedom produced a situation of unfreedom, which in turn generated more dreams of freedom:

the european community which participated in the great change-over from the predominantly agricultural to the industrial age presented

us with the French Revolution, which was made possible by the super-agriculturalist dreams of Rousseau. While these people bustled into factories, or were driven into them, building themselves more rigidly and irretrievably into a mechanical urban life, they exploded in dreams of bucolic “freedom.” Pictures of the “freedom” of the noble savage and the child excited them to a great outburst at the very moment when (as they must from their own point of view have regarded it had they not been so full of a false and exotic emotion) they were enslaving themselves more thoroughly to men. So it has been in the name of nature always that men have combined to overthrow the natural in themselves. (*ABR*, 41-2)

Although this relationship is reciprocal it is also problematic, as the terms, freedom and slavery, would appear to contradict rather than reinforce each other. Lewis locates the cause of this apparent contradiction in the nature of the hearts and minds of those people who ‘bustled into factories’:

For their instinct to be so fallible, where, it would seem, so much is at stake for them – for them to proclaim so ardently that they wish to be “free” and nature’s children, and yet, in effect, to carry through great movements that result in an absolute mechanization of their life – can only mean one thing. It must mean that they do not really know what they want, that they do not, in their heart, desire “freedom” or anything of the sort. “Freedom” postulates a relatively solitary life: and the majority of people are extremely gregarious. A disciplined, well-policed, herd-life is what they most desire. (*ABR*, 42)

This assertion about what ‘the majority of people [...] most desire’ moves towards resolving the contradiction by claiming that one of the terms was misstated: although freedom was held up as desirable, this was inaccurate as ‘the majority of people’ did not really desire it at all. However, this does not resolve the issue but merely shifts slightly the location of the contradiction, which now becomes a matter of rhetorical inaccuracy and psychological fallibility. Lewis’s answer to the question of why ‘the majority of people’ think they desire to be free when, in fact, ‘herd-life is what they most desire’ introduces the notion of a ‘usually quite weak’ impulse toward what he sees as genuine freedom:

That men should *think* they wish to be free, the origin of this grave and universal mistake, is the (usually quite weak) primitive animal in them coming into his own for a moment. It is the restless solitary ghost in them that in idle moments they turn to. The mistake can be best appreciated, perhaps, by examining a great holiday crowd. How can these masses of slowly, painfully, moving people find any enjoyment in such immense stuffy discomfort, petty friction, and unprofitable fatigue, you may ask yourself as you watch them. They ask themselves that, too, no doubt, most of them. That is the saturnalian, libertarian, rebellious self that asserts itself for a moment. (ABR, 42)

This idea of a weak impulse for freedom which exists even in 'the majority of people', but is only strong enough to assert itself 'for a moment', implies a split or double nature of the human mind, which is, as a result, at conflict with itself. In accordance with his generally rather gloomy outlook on humanity, Lewis suggests that the weak, but clearly, in his eyes, superior impulse is generally going to lose out, and interestingly he attributes this loss of individual freedom to individual choice:

if they [i.e. 'the majority of people'] *have to choose* between what ultimately the suggestions of the "free" self, and the far steadier, stronger impulse of the gregarious, town-loving, mechanical self, would lead to, they invariably choose the latter. So to be "free" for one person is not what to be "free" for another would be. Most people's favourite spot in "nature" is to be found in the body of another person, or in the mind of another person, not in meadows, plains, woods, and trees. They depend for their stimulus on people, not things. So inevitably they are not "free" nor have any wish to be, in the lonely, "independent," wild, romantic, rousseauesque way. In short, the last thing that they wish for is to be free. They wish to pretend to be "free" once a week, or once a month. To be free all the time would be an appalling prospect for them. And they prefer "freedom" to take a violent, super-real, and sensational form. They are not to the manner born where "freedom" is concerned; and so invariably overplay it, when they affect it. (ABR, 42)

I would argue that this idea of freedom as recreation has, despite its intrinsic snobbery and patronising assumption of knowledge about the desires of 'the majority of people', some satirical force, even today: overpaid managers undergoing wilderness survival training is a perhaps

too obvious example. However, what is more relevant to the present argument is the way in which Lewis's ideas about freedom interact with his ideas about gender.

In the chapter 'Super-Freedom of the Revolutionary Rich' (*ABR*, 134-7) Lewis characterises four types of freedom: that of the child, the king or millionaire, the woman, and the intellect. These different types of freedom involve different relationships to other people and to power. Lewis writes that: 'The type of freedom of which the child is the perpetual emblem, irresponsible freedom, and that other of which the king or millionaire is the emblem, that reposing on authority and power, are both rigidly dependent on other people' (*ABR*, 135). In contrast to these types of freedom, which Lewis sees as exercising power over others (by means of wealth or dependency) and which are 'both obtained at the expense of other people' is the 'third type of freedom, the feminine type', which 'is a parasite of power', and has as its 'first requisite [...] a master' (*ABR*, 135). The fourth type of freedom, clearly Lewis's favourite, is described as 'very rare', and is allegedly 'possessed by the intellect alone':

It is contingent on no physical circumstance, is not obtained or held at the expense of others – indeed, it is altogether independent of people; and although it is a source of power, is an unrecognized and unofficial source, and takes with it, under favourable circumstances, some of the advantages of irresponsibility; and at the worst, and deprived of all power, still, as freedom, remains unaffected by fortune. But it is not a type with which we need concern ourselves here. (*ABR*, 135-6)

Although this fourth and ideal type of freedom is not personified in the way that the other derided types of freedom are, there is an implication that it is masculine in some way; the child and the millionaire mirror each other in that one exerts power through its lack of means, the other through its excessive possession of them, and if we were to try and find a characteristic to mirror the feminine in a similar way it would undoubtedly be the masculine. Indeed, by looking at the values Lewis ascribes to the fourth type of freedom we can get an idea of what he might associate with

the feminine: a reliance on 'physical circumstance'; being 'held at the expense of others'; not 'independent of people'; and 'affected by fortune'.

Lewis's notion of 'feminine freedom' is not gender-specific, in the sense that it can apply to men as well as women. Indeed, Lewis sees the spread of this feminine idea of freedom to regions previously masculine as one of the disturbing features of the modern world he criticises in *The Art of Being Ruled*:

The commutative nature of *freedom* and *irresponsibility* in what I have called the feminine conception of freedom – which is the type of freedom which is gradually substituting itself today with the European for the masculine, which circumstances have almost compelled him to discard – that is the true key to this great movement throughout Europe. (ABR, 239)

Lewis's account of the effeminisation of Europe is interesting as he presents this process as more natural than unnatural: 'it is a law that, if left alone, or sufficiently supported by the intricacies of civilization, an individual invariably tends to evade any position of burdensome trust, or indeed any *position* at all' (ABR, 239). The idea that effeminisation is a product of the workings of a 'law' unimpeded by the 'intricacies of civilization' suggests that feminine freedom is the natural state of things, and that any distinction between the masculine and the feminine that may emerge is an unnatural aberration.

For Lewis, the clearest sign of this general effeminisation of Europe was the increased visibility and acceptance of homosexuality in post-war society. Lewis argues that 'Sex inversion for the male' is a 'receipt' for the 'evasion' of the responsibilities of masculine freedom and the assumption of 'feminine freedom' in its place (ABR, 239). Lewis claims that the significance of homosexuality is primarily political:

Separated from its physical peculiarities, disincarnate, and in its form of social impulse, if we can imagine it so, before it has been furnished with the particular body it at present has, male sex-inversion can be regarded, I believe, as the prognostication of a deep revolution in the european character. (ABR, 240)

Lewis here again relies on an idea of the separation of the mind and body, much as he did with the exemplary story of the disappointed bridegroom, a story that was in fact introduced to help break down what Lewis calls the ‘unfortunate conservative human-all-too-human norm that we are incessantly combating’ in matters of sexuality (ABR, 211). With homosexuality, as with the loss of virginity, Lewis claims that it is wrong to assume that it is the ‘*physical* plane’ that is significant, arguing that it ‘would be extremely unreasonable’ to ‘be in some way physically offended by practices “against nature”’ (ABR, 210). Lewis’s argument proceeds not by insisting on the normality and acceptability of so-called ‘abnormal’ sexual practices, but by stressing the arbitrary nature of all human norms, when viewed from an objective and transcendent perspective:

to an impartial taste, divinely exempt from participation in either normal or “abnormal” joys, as we call them, their “normality” would be just as offensive. They might very well offend the most fastidious god more than the object of *their* disgust; for their “norm” should be merely the dislike or revolt of the senses against something *different*, not part of their personal norm of system. It would, in short, be the animal self-complacency and self-love that thinks itself “natural” and engaging, and everything else “unnatural” and disengaging. (ABR, 210)

Lewis’s argument against prejudice against homosexuality works by degrading the normal to the level of the animal, rather than by dignifying the supposedly abnormal as human. Lewis invokes an almost paranoid feeling of the precariousness of the human position to emphasise the vanity and ephemeral nature of all human norms:

Some human norm [...] hates the rat and beetle. But its idea of the rat is not at all that which the rat has of itself; it loves its swift, clammy sausage of a body as much as the human being does his hairless, erect machine. That erect, conceited human norm may yet have to bend to the will of that rat or the serpent, and go about with its belly near the ground. (ABR, 210)

Lewis's removal of matters of sexuality from a normative idea of nature to the more malleable realm of culture and politics is not the progressive move it may seem to some postmodern anti-naturalists, as its prime consequence is to label homosexuality, and indeed sexuality in general, as fundamentally false, a fashionable affectation rather than a matter of involuntary desire. However, it would be wrong simply to dismiss Lewis as a particularly sneaky homophobe, as his sense of the fundamentally false nature of sexual identity is not restricted to homosexuality, a mode of masculinity to which he was unsympathetic, but also extends to modes of masculinity which were far more to his taste, for example, the aggressively virile avant-garde artist, and as we will see, perhaps masculinity altogether.

Despite this general denaturalisation of sexuality Lewis does retain some idea of natural and genuine homosexuality, not caused by fashion or the revolt against masculine authority:

The most agreeable inverts to be met [...] are the true-blue inverts: those who, whatever the orthodoxy of the moment, would certainly be unaffected by it, and would be there busy with all the rather complicated arrangements incident to their favourite pursuit. (*ABR*, 213)

Indeed, Lewis characterises these 'natural' homosexuals, who he refers to as 'those people whom a displacement of sex psychology marks out for physical paradox', as exceptionally masculine:

This male-pole type of invert is often entirely free from that feminine bias, resulting in caricature so often, of the female of the genus; or that of the convert to inversion, the most fanatical at all. What this male invert thinks of his female it is impossible to say without being one yourself. But certainly he gives the impression of being much more *male* in the traditional and doctrinaire sense than any other male. His pride is often enormous in his maleness. If perhaps a little over-fine and even mad, he can meet on equal terms the male of any other species – either the lion, the male of the farmyard fowl, the Samurai, the powdered male gallant of the Stuart stage. (*ABR*, 213)

This authentically abnormal figure is something of an anomaly in Lewis's argument as he generally emphasises the cultural and disincarnate aspect of sexuality rather than invoking any natural and physiological basis. However, Lewis has a logical need of the figure of the 'true-blue invert' in order to convict the fashionable and non-pukka homosexual of being inauthentically abnormal, with a sexuality determined by their weak and over-impressionable minds rather than any genuine abnormality of their bodies. If Lewis did not maintain some minimal position of authenticity, even if it is an 'abnormal' one, if he argued that all sexuality was culturally and politically constructed he would deprive himself of any Archimedean point from which to make his criticisms, as the difference would merely be between different types of constructed and false sexuality, rather than the more fundamental difference between the fashionably false and the 'pukka'.

This difference between the 'pukka' and the false homosexual is presented in terms of social class: the fashion for homosexuality is, Lewis argues, 'a *bourgeois* revolution', predominated by the '*petit bourgeois* type', a term of abuse which Lewis sees as going 'as far as human vituperation will go' (*ABR*, 212-3). Andrew Hewitt, in his book *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary* (1996), has argued that the granting of authenticity to the figure of the 'true-blue invert' is an expression of Lewis's political preference for an aristocratic ideal over a democratic one:

The "super-masculine" reasserts itself here – subsumed under the general category of inversion – but asserts itself as "true-blue." In other words, Lewis is envisaging a genuine – perhaps "blue-blooded," or "aristocratic"? – revolutionary impulse emanating from the phenomenon of inversion.³

Hewitt argues that Lewis's finds in Fredrick the Great 'a "true-blue" aristocratic model of inversion' who 'open[s] up fascism as a realm of

³ Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 190-1.

homosexualised politics to which he would be sympathetic'.⁴ According to Hewitt, Lewis opposes the 'true-blue' figure of Fredrick to the 'transvestite' figure of Haroun al Raschid whose 'most objectionable habit, namely that of spending his time disguised among his subjects as one of them' he saw as being practised by many contemporary rulers (*ABR*, 93). As we will see later, in the analysis of 'The War Baby', Lewis saw 'disguise' as being something which could performatively confer distinction, suggesting that Haroun al Raschid's habit was 'objectionable' because it revealed the real situation – that he was merely 'a pea disguising itself from a million other peas' (see below, and *UP*, 94). Hewitt writes that 'It is as if Frederick were, so to speak, engaging in travesty not by dressing as a woman, but by refusing to do so'.⁵ In terms of performance and disguise, Frederick maintains his 'pukka' performance of a 'ruler' by not disguising himself as what, in fact, he really is.

Although the figure of the 'true-blue invert' is an interesting one I would argue that its main function is to allow Lewis to expose the false rather than provide him with an image of the true. Hewitt's comment that 'It would stretch the limits of [his] book to describe' what Lewis's 'homosexualised' fascism 'would look like' suggests that the 'true-blue invert' is, like so many of Lewis's figures of authenticity, what Fredric Jameson calls a 'a dead letter, a contradiction in terms, an ideal and impossible synthesis of incompatible characteristics, a merely logical possibility which no narrative – let alone real history itself – can concretely generate'.⁶

Although it would seem that history cannot 'generate' his ideal of the natural, albeit 'abnormal', man, Lewis does identify a precise historical cause for the modern 'fashion' for false homosexuality:

⁴ Hewitt, *Political Inversions*, p. 194. See also *ABR*, 73-4, 181.

⁵ Hewitt, *Political Inversions*, p. 193.

⁶ Hewitt, *Political Inversions*, p. 194. Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979), p. 120.

it is in the experiences of war time that we must seek not only the impulsion, but in some sense the justification, of male sex-inversion [...]. As a war-time birth it can be regarded as a reply to the implications of *responsibility* of those times: nature's *never again* in the overstrained male organism.

After the war it was reported that french mothers [...] were vociferating, as they probably did, that they would bring up no more children into the world to be brought up and then killed. But more than the mothers, during the war no doubt men too were saying to themselves subconsciously that at last, beyond any doubt, the game was not worth the candle: that the Heroic Age was nothing to this: that the "kiss" they would receive "when they came back again," if they ever did, did not make them look any less foolish as "heroes," but more so; and that the institution of manhood had in some way overreached itself or got into the caricatural stage. (*ABR*, 247)

What is interesting about Lewis's account of homosexuality is not his idea of a 'natural' response to a historical event, but the idea of the unnaturalness of masculinity that it implies. Lewis makes this implied unnaturalness explicit, rather than trying to deny it:

Men were only made into "men" with great difficulty even in primitive society: the male is not naturally "a man" any more than the woman. He has to propped up into that position with some ingenuity, and is always likely to collapse. (*ABR*, 247)

This idea of the constructed and precarious nature of masculinity is yet another indication of Lewis's view of gender as 'secondary equipment', only now not of 'grace and feminineness' but of pugnacious masculinity. Lewis's term 'propped up' does not seem a very serious one, and his idea of the unnaturalness of masculinity is often treated as comic:

There are very many male Europeans today who never become reconciled to the idea of being "men" (leaving out of the count those who are congenitally unadapted for the rigours of manhood). At thirty-five, forty-five, fifty-five, *und so weiter*, you find them still luxuriously and rebelliously prostrate; still pouting, lisping, and sobbing, spread-eagled on their backs, helpless and inviting caresses, like a bald-stomached dog. (*ABR*, 248)

However, we should not allow this apparent lack of seriousness to disguise the significance of Lewis's position; indeed, Lewis's jokiness may serve to distract from some of the more radical implications of his thinking.

Lewis's account of the historical development of masculinity makes clear that he views it as ideological, in the sense that it is a cultural construct which has come to appear as a natural phenomenon:

The position of the male today, and the symbolism of the word MAN, are purely artificial: no more for one sex than for the other are the heroic ardours, "intellectuality," *responsibility*, and so forth, that we associate with male, *natural*. Men had grown to regard them as natural, because in the first place they had seemed profitable. (*ABR*, 249)

Lewis sees this artificial process of becoming a man as one to which the male has a natural resistance, writing that:

A man, then, is made, not born: and he is made, of course, with very great difficulty. From the time he yells and kicks in the cradle, to the time he receives his last kick at school, he is recalcitrant. (*ABR*, 247-8)

Given the male's 'recalcitrance' to become a man, it perhaps seems unlikely that this transformation ever happens; Lewis is aware of this problem, and examines several possible explanations as to why this artificial process occurs. The first possibility examined is that males become men as the result of such 'feminine taunt[s]' as '*Be a MAN!*' or '*CALL YOURSELF A MAN!*', but Lewis dismisses this possibility, claiming that 'we can confidently look forward to the time' when these taunts 'will be without effect' (*ABR*, 248). Lewis then considers the possibility that masculinity is constructed as a result of a sense of duty, itself motivated by vanity. This possibility is deemed unsatisfactory for two reasons: firstly, he claims that 'vanity requires its regulation food, which gets scarcer every day'; and secondly, because vanity itself 'is not such a primary thing as is usually supposed' (*ABR*, 248). The second reason is the clearer and more interesting of the

two, as Lewis argues that the vanity invoked by the 'feminine taunt' to 'CALL YOURSELF A MAN!':

depends on the concept MAN for its effectiveness. And that is a belief, like a belief in God. Reduce a man's vanity below a certain point, or destroy his capacity for belief, and he subsides into his natural and primitive conditions. (ABR, 249)

Lewis sees this 'capacity for belief' and dependence on the 'concept MAN' as central, even arguing that the '*instinct of self-preservation*', which could 'be dragged in as a hypothetic support of the man', is 'artificial' rather than natural, claiming that it is 'the result of training and experience' (ABR, 249). This stress on the importance of a 'capacity for belief' in the construction of masculinity is another indication of the overlap of Lewis's thinking on gender and his ideas about reality and belief that were discussed in Chapter One. It is clear that Lewis sees his idea of an artificial masculinity enabled by belief as being on the side of 'reality' and the sense of personality, rather than that of the depersonalising and feminine 'Real'. Indeed, he explicitly connects the process of becoming a man with that of acquiring a personality:

What it is painfully acquiring during the years of its gradual propping up and training in erectness, is a *personality*. Without a *personality* there is no instinct of preservation: or rather, the less personality there is, the less horror there is at the idea of losing it. Many animals whose lot it is to be eaten are probably *willingly* eaten, as has already been suggested. When the male of the epira is devoured by its mate in the midst of its tumescence, that is part of the fun. (ABR, 249)

For Lewis the loss of '*personality*' and of the 'capacity for belief', here associated explicitly with masculinity, results in animal violence in which the female is dominant, and the male '*willingly*' destroyed.

In Lewis's argument subjective belief comes before and helps construct the material object that is supposedly believed in: the psychological notion of masculinity precedes the physiological man and gives it the 'arbitrary [...] machinery' needed to effect its propping up.

Masculinity in *The Art of Being Ruled*, like ‘reality’ in *Time and Western Man*, ‘is in fact simply *belief*’ (*TWM*, 351). The constitutive power of this ‘belief’, its power to physically shape reality, is indicated in Lewis’s argument that men’s bodies, as well as their minds, have been shaped by the ideology of masculinity:

The large, bloated, and sinewy appearance of the male, again, is partly a result of manual work or physical exercise, but is the result as well of thousands of years of ACTING THE MAN. The more muscular frame of the male, and his greater hardihood, are illusions, like everything else about him, provisionally and precariously realized, but no more stable than the muscular development produced by some intensive course of physical exercise, resulting in the inflation of this system of muscles or that. He is blown out by vanity into a *bigger* and *bonier* creature than his consort, like Shakespeare’s Ajax. *He is in reality just the same size, and of just the same sort.* (*ABR*, 250)

Although Lewis’s account of the ideological development of masculinity may seem logically to lead to a notion of the artificiality of all gender, this passage makes it clear that, in this chapter of the book at least, he sees a key difference between the masculine and the feminine: whereas the masculine is a product of ideologically motivated performance – ‘thousands of years of ACTING THE MAN’ – the feminine, in contrast to this, is seen as the natural state from which this aberration propped itself up. The collapse of masculinity is seen by Lewis as a collapse back into the feminine, not into some non-gendered state:

Remove the arbitrary psychological machinery that in this way constitutes the mere male “a man,” or tamper with it too much, or overtax it, and he collapses and becomes to all intents and purposes a woman. [...] The extreme rapidity with which these collapses occur (both in the specifically adipose bulk of the female, and the secondary muscular “manliness” of the male) has been witnessed since the war. (*ABR*, 250)

This idea of the collapse of masculinity into the feminine is perhaps best understood in the terms of Žižek’s distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘the

Real' introduced in Chapter One. Žižek's description of what happens when 'the subject undergoes a "loss of reality"' and encounters 'the Real' is analogous to Lewis's account of the collapse into the feminine, as the 'nightmarish universe' which the subject experiences 'is not "pure fantasy" but, on the contrary, *that which remains of reality after reality is deprived of its support in fantasy*'.⁷ Likewise, in Lewis's account, what the masculine experiences when it undergoes a loss of masculinity is not something unreal, but that which remains of masculinity after masculinity is deprived of its 'arbitrary psychological machinery', namely the feminine. This association of the feminine with 'the Real', with 'reality' deprived of its supporting fantasies or beliefs, may perhaps help explain Lewis's aversion to 'the passion for the Real': the maintenance of 'reality' can also be seen as a maintenance of masculinity, and Lewis's dislike of 'the Real' becomes just another version of modernist misogyny. What is interesting about Lewis's misogyny and fear of the engulfing feminine 'Real' is that it produces a notion of the performative nature of masculinity that not only seems ahead of its time, but also has great satirical force and considerable comic potential.

⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, (London & New York: Verso, 1997), p. 66

The War Stories:

‘a pea disguising itself from a million other peas’

Lewis’s argument that the collapse of masculinity he analyzes in *The Art of Being Ruled* was caused by the First World War raises the question of whether any such collapse can be seen in the fiction he was producing during the war. I believe that it can, and that the Great War, as well as his fictional output during it, provide an essential context for understanding Lewis’s attitude toward gender.⁸

‘The French Poodle’ (1916) tells the story of a shell shocked soldier:

Rob Cairn was drifting around London in mufti, by no means well, and full of anxiety, the result of his ill-health and the shock he had received at finding himself blown into the air and painted yellow by the unavoidable shell. His tenure on earth seemed insecure, and he could not accustom himself to the idea of insecurity. When the shell came he had not bounded gracefully and coldly up, but with a clumsy dismay. His spirit, that spirit that should have been winged for the life of a soldier, and ready fiercely to take flight into the unknown, strong for other lives, was also grubbily attached to the earth. It, like his body, was not graceful in its fearlessness, nor resilient, nor young. All the minutiae of existence mesmerized it. It could not disport itself genially in independence of surrounding objects and ideas.⁹

This description of shell shock, in which the spirit becomes like the body, and its aspirations for transcendence are rendered ridiculous by the realisation that it ‘was also grubbily attached to the earth’, is similar to some of the more sophisticated clinical accounts put forward at the time, which understood shell shock as a form of ‘hysteria’, normally considered a

⁸ Lewis’s war stories have not been as much the focus of critical attention as they should. However, for an interesting discussion which touches on several of the issues raised in this chapter see David H. Parker, ‘Tarr and Wyndham Lewis’s War-Time Stories’, *Southern Review: Literary and Interdisciplinary Essays* 8, (1975), pp. 166-81.

⁹ Wyndham Lewis, ‘The French Poodle’, first published in 1916, in *Unlucky For Pringle: Unpublished and Other Stories*, eds. C. J. Fox & Robert T. Chapman, (London: Vision Press, 1973), p. 53.

female disease, linked causally to experiences of immobility and powerlessness in the trenches.¹⁰ Elaine Showalter summarises these views:

When all signs of physical fear were judged as weakness and where alternatives to combat – pacifism, conscientious objection, desertion, even suicide – were viewed as unmanly, men were silenced and immobilized and forced, like women, to express their conflicts through the body. Placed in intolerable circumstances of stress, and expected to react with unnatural “courage,” thousands of soldiers reacted instead with the symptoms of hysteria.¹¹

The idea of a dissatisfaction with established ideas of masculinity expressing itself through the body can also be seen in Lewis's argument in *The Art of Being Ruled* that homosexuality can be understood as ‘nature's never again in the overstrained male organism’ (ABR, 247). At another point in *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis writes that ‘the whole structure of what we associate with manhood can crash, in the way that the personality of a shell-shocked man disintegrates in a moment’ (ABR, 260). Lewis's description of Cairn's shell shock in ‘The French Poodle’ also demonstrates how the experience of war removes the fantasies or ‘arbitrary psychological machinery’ that sustain Cairn's masculinity: his belief that his ‘spirit that should have been winged for the life of a soldier, and ready fiercely to take flight into the unknown, strong for other lives’ is shown to be inadequate to the experience of ‘the Real’ of war. In place of his masculine fantasies Cairn has to confront feelings of insecurity and a lack of independence; instead of being an individual in control of his environment, Cairn has been reduced to the ‘it’ of his body, which ‘could not disport itself genially in independence of surrounding objects and ideas’. The mesmerisation with ‘the minutiae of existence’ which Cairn experiences is similar to the indiscriminate fascination characteristic of the infantile Satters in *The Childermass*. Lewis presents Cairn's shell shock, his ‘rather sullen

¹⁰ See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, first published 1985, (London: Virago Press, 1987), in particular Chapter Seven: ‘Male Hysteria: W. H. R. Rivers and the Lessons of Shell Shock’, pp. 167-94.

¹¹ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 171.

neurasthenia', as stemming from the 'thought of recommencing', as a 'fear not of death but of being played with too much'.¹² This fear of being 'played with' reinforces the idea that Cairn feels he has been reduced to an object which can be moved at the will of outside forces, and can no longer see himself as an independent and autonomous man, possessed of a masculine 'spirit'. In the terms of Lewis's theory of the comic Cairn is exposed to be a 'thing' rather than a 'person'. It seems possible that Lewis's ideas about comedy were affected by the experience of the First World War, and that his later delight in the comedy of the collapse of the autonomy of the personality has historical roots that are more tragic than might immediately be apparent.

The collapse of the masculine fantasy of personal autonomy in the face of 'the Real' of the First World War is also a feature of 'Cantleman's Spring-Mate' (1917), although in this story the protagonist is comically unaware of it, and the collapse occurs before he has experienced any combat. Most of the story takes place in the English countryside, and follows the thoughts and actions of Cantleman, a trainee soldier, as he meets, seduces, impregnates, and leaves a local woman called Stella.

The story begins with a passage of mock-pastoral, in which Cantleman walks through 'strenuous fields' full of animals joyfully mating with each other, a general fecundity characterised in comically anti-Romantic fashion:

The birds with their little gnarled feet, and beaks made for fishing worms out of the mould, or the river, would have considered Shelley's references to the skylark – or any other poet's paeans to their species – as lamentably inadequate to describe the beauty of birds! The female bird, for her particular part, reflected that, in spite of the ineptitude of her sweetheart's latest song, which he insisted on deafening her with, never seemed to tire of, and was so persuaded that she liked as much as he did himself, and although outwardly she remained critical and vicious: that all the same and nevertheless,

¹² Lewis, 'The French Poodle', p. 54.

chock, chock, peep, peep, he was a fluffy object from which certain satisfaction could be derived! ('Spring-Mate', 77)

There is no natural harmony here between bird and bird but there is still desire for a 'certain satisfaction' on the female's part, which persists in spite of the irritating nature of her mate's deluded advances, and results in her viewing him as an 'object'. Although this mismatch of male and female desire is comic, there is a darker and more violent side to the denial of any Romantic or progressive view of nature:

The only jarring note in this vast mutual admiration society was the fact that many of its members showed their fondness for their neighbour in an embarrassing way: that is they killed and ate them. But the weaker were so used to dying violent deaths and being eaten that they worried very little about it. – The West was gushing up a harmless volcano of fire, obviously intended as an immense dreamy nightcap. ('Spring-Mate', 78)

The view of nature presented here is very much in a post-Darwinian, 'red in tooth and claw', mould, and the reference to 'The West' suggests that it extends beyond the animal to include the human world as well, specifically the First World War, uneasily described as 'an immense dreamy nightcap'. This conflation of the human and the animal, the reproductive and the destructive, is central to this story, and significant in much of Lewis's later thought.

Cattleman's desire for Stella is presented as non-human, as he views her first as an object, second as an animal:

Cattleman in the midst of his cogitation on surrounding life, surprised his faithless and unfriendly brain in the act of turning over an object which humiliated his meditation. He found that he was wondering whether at his return through the village lying between him and the Camp, he would see the girl he had passed there three hours before. At that time he had not begun his philosophizing, and without interference from conscience, he had noticed the redness of her cheeks, the animal fulness [sic] of the childbearing hips, with an eye as innocent as the bird or the beast. ('Spring-Mate', 78)

The idea of the female object-animal, and the desire 'it' arouses, impinging disruptively and involuntarily on male subjectivity and 'philosophizing' has a long history in English literature and Western thought in general. The interesting thing about Lewis's reiteration of it lies in his comic treatment of it, the anxieties it reveals about masculinity, and the way in which it can be seen to be connected to the events of the First World War.

Cantleman, like many of Lewis's protagonists, sees himself as superior to those around him, assuming a cosmic snobbery:

Cantleman had a more human, as well as a little more divine understanding, than those usually on his left and right, and he had had, not so long ago, conspicuous hopes that such a conjecture might produce a new human chemistry. But he must repudiate the human entirely, if that there were to be brought off. ('Spring-Mate', 79)

Cantleman assumes the role of the 'observer', and considers himself able to perceive the truth of his situation:

The miraculous camouflage of Nature did not deceive this observer. He saw everywhere the gun-pits and the "nests of death." Each puff of green leaves he knew was in some way as harmful as the burst of a shell. [...] The hypocrisy of Nature and the hypocrisy of War were the same. ('Spring-Mate', 82)

Convinced of the identity of 'Nature' and 'war', Cantleman sets himself defiantly against both, desiring not only to 'repudiate the human' but 'life' in general:

He, Cantleman, did not want to owe anything to life, or enter into league or understanding with her. The thing was either to go out of existence: or, failing that, remain in it unreconciled, indifferent to Nature's threat, consorting openly with her enemies, making war within her war upon her servants. In short, the spectacle of the handsome English spring produced nothing but ideas of defiance in Cantleman's mind. ('Spring-Mate', 82-3)

Cantleman's 'ideas of defiance' provide him with a handy philosophical reason to have sex with Stella, who is associated in his mind with 'Nature' and 'War':

As to Stella, she was a sort of Whizzbang. With a treachery worthy of a Hun, Nature tempted him towards her. He was drugged with delicious appetites. Very well! He would hoist the Unseen Powers with his own petard. He could throw back Stella where she was discharged from (if it were allowable, now, to change her into a bomb) first having relieved himself of this humiliating gnawing and yearning in his blood.

As to Stella, considered as an unconscious agent, all women were contaminated with Nature's hostile power and might be treated as spies or enemies. [...] So he approached Stella with as much falsity as he could muster. ('Spring-Mate', 83)

Cantleman's 'falsity' culminates in a marriage proposal:

At their third meeting he brought her a ring. Her melting gratitude was immediately ligotted with long arms, full of contradictory and offending fire of Spring. On the warm earth consent flowed up into her body from all the veins of the landscape. ('Spring-Mate', 83)

Cantleman's attitude towards sex is not one of 'gratitude' but of violent resentment:

That night he spat out, in gushes of thick delicious rage, all the lust that had gathered in his body. The nightingale sang ceaselessly in the small wood at the top of the field where they lay. He grinned up towards it as he noticed it, and once more turned to the devouring of his mate. He bore down upon her as though he wished to mix her body into the soil, and pour his seed into a more methodless matter, the brown phalanges of floury land. As their two bodies shook and melted together, he felt that he was raiding the bowels of Nature: he was proud that he could remain deliberately aloof, and gaze bravely, like a minute insect, up at the immense and melancholy night, with all its mad nightingales, piously folded small brown wings in a million nests, night-working stars, and misty useless watchmen. ('Spring-Mate', 83)

This passage could be read as a simple expression of male sexual aggression, Lewis's as much as Cattleman's, but this would be to ignore the irony of Cattleman being described as a 'minute insect', a simile which suggests that he is not as 'aloof' from nature as he thinks he is. The image of the insect was generally a negative one for Lewis – his references to 'insect communism' in *Time and Western Man* (TWM, 298) are typical – and it is significant that in *The Art of Being Ruled* one of the examples of 'the abstract rage of hunger and reproduction' was 'the swallowing of the male by the female epira' (ABR, 232), an image of the violent destruction of the male by female sexuality that, while it might not escape a charge of misogyny, renders ironic Cattleman's claims to 'defiance', and his belief that it is he who does the 'devouring'. In *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis also suggests that the male epira allows itself to be eaten by the female as he has no personality: 'Without a *personality* there is no instinct of preservation: or rather, the less personality there is, the less horror there is at the idea of losing it' (ABR, 249). Although Cattleman spends most of the story trying to assert his individual personality, it seems that, in the light of Lewis's later work, he is unsuccessful and despite all the exertions of his vanity becomes unpropped and collapses, and is engulfed the 'abstract rage of hunger and reproduction' over which he has tried to sustain himself.

There is also irony when Cattleman returns to the camp with 'a smile of severe satisfaction on his face':

It did not occur to him that his action might have been supremely unimportant as far as Stella was concerned. He had not even asked himself if, had he not been there that night, someone else might have been there in his place. He was also convinced that the laurels were his, and that Nature had come off badly. ('Spring-Mate', 84)

This passage heavily hints that 'his action' was indeed 'supremely unimportant' to Stella, and that he was mistaken in his conviction 'that Nature had come off badly'. Although Cattleman views 'his action' with Stella as a carefully philosophised act of violent defiance against a nature

which has been fooled by his falsity, the narrative voice consistently undercuts this, juxtaposing jarring and ironic notes to his stream of vast and anti-social self-admiration. The story ends with an uneasy passage, which again conflates sex and war and nature:

And when he beat a German's brains out it was with the same impartial malignity that he had displayed in the English night with his Spring-mate. Only he had considered there too that he was in some way outwitting Nature, and had no adequate realization of the extent to which evidently the death of a Hun was to the advantage of the world. ('Spring-Mate', 84)

Again, the real significance of Cantleman's action is shown to be at odds with his perception of it, and his belief that he is acting against nature is shown to be deluded and unreal. Cantleman's attempts at a defiant and aggressively masculine individuality are shown to be effortlessly reintegrated into a 'Nature' which is characterised as both feminine and military, and full of the 'abstract rage of hunger and reproduction'. This failure of individuality could also be seen as allegorising the inability of the individual, however sophisticated their philosophy may be, to separate themselves from and remain unaffected by the social, political, and military reality of the First World War.

In *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis theorised that 'abstract rage of hunger and reproduction' could only be avoided by maintaining a superficiality and separation, arguing that 'we are *surface creatures*' (ABR, 231). Lewis saw art and the figure of the artist as an essential factor in maintaining this superficiality: 'it is the spirit of the artist that maintains this superficiality, differentiation of existence, for us: our personal, our detached life, in short, in distinction to our crowd-life' (ABR, 232). The comedy of 'Cantleman's Spring-Mate' comes from Cantleman's inability to maintain a 'differentiation of existence' and his continued ignorance of his failure. While he is far from an everyman character the comedy of Cantleman's failure follows the pattern of the crisis of masculinity in the First World War: the realisation that the old beliefs and conventions that

had defined ways of being male could not cope with the new realities of modern war, a realisation that was personally traumatic as well as productive of great social change.

In 'The War Baby' (1919), a story with a protagonist far more self-aware and with more of 'the spirit of the artist' than Cantleman, the self-conscious performance of a masculine individuality is as prone to becoming unpropped and collapsing as Cantleman's. The description of the 'West Berks Hotel', where much of the action of 'The War Baby' takes place, introduces a sense of theatre early on in the story: it 'was like theatrical store. It contained a variety of military properties' ('Baby', 85). This sense of theatre also manifests itself in the self-conscious performance of the protagonist, Richard Beresin. Like Cantleman, Beresin considers himself superior to those around him, and when he joined the army:

He became a little literary – snubbed, in a schoolboy way, with an impermeable contempt, his fellows with less fortunate histories. He wore a bracelet, read Huysmans in his dug-out, wore mufti whenever opportunity offered, acquired a settled consciousness of the aristocratic idea. He began to visualize himself as a young blood – he sought in his ancestry for the bluest seeming streams, courted imaginary ghosts. His Nietzschean illusion almost broke the heart of his subservient soldier-servant. [...] Both he and his soldier-servant saw the same popular image of a perfection. ('Baby', 90)

However, the pursuit of this 'image of a perfection' is hampered by the situation in which he finds himself:

the war grew more and more a sinister phantom. The death-line was always there, crackling, thumping away. He could not take his aristocratic ideal to his bosom, and luxuriate with it, so near to a harsh extinction. ('Baby', 90)

The conflict between Beresin's ideals of masculinity and the reality of the First World War is given clear expression here, and echoes the conflict between Cairn's 'spirit' and his 'fear of being played with too much'. In

both cases fantasies of masculinity are shown to be irreconcilable with 'the Real' of war, exactly the mismatch that can be seen as the basis of shell shock.

Beresin is at least partially aware of the artificiality of the distinction he attempts to maintain. In an imagined discourse with his servant, he makes the following statement:

You are always a pea disguising itself from a million other peas. The other peas all know you are a pea, and love to think of a pea like themselves being a soft, subtle, clever, insolent pea! But your identity is precarious. Yes, you must be lavish; otherwise – you will receive that deadly look that one pea gives another when pretence is laid aside. ('Baby', 94)

The idea that Beresin's sense of distinction and aristocratic superiority is a matter of disguising a fundamental uniformity by the means of deliberate performance is similar to Lewis's ideas about the performed nature of masculinity in *The Art of Being Ruled*. In both instances there is an attempt to create distinction out of a fundamental uniformity through a performance: for Beresin, acting the aristocrat when really just a pea like 'a million other peas'; in *The Art of Being Ruled* by 'ACTING THE MAN' when in fact 'There is no mysterious *difference* between the nature of the sexes' (*ABR*, 250).

Beresin's attempted disguise of his 'pea'-hood by the adoption of a 'Nietzschean illusion' is presented as based on a psychological need, rather than any innate nobility:

all he required was an illustrious segregation, a superiority. He would imitate any figure that would satisfy the natural vanity of a young animal with an acute sense of its personal life, without worrying too much about the details of your argument. ('Baby', 94)

The idea that Beresin's aristocratic performance is a product of his animal vanity is not only interesting as a possible moment of unguarded and perceptive self-criticism by Lewis, but also as an indication of how Lewis's

later ideas in *The Art of Being Ruled* were already taking shape during the First World War. In *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis, as we have seen above, argues that vanity can be seen to play a part in the construction of masculinity, but that it is not the fundamental motivation – a role taken by belief in personality (ABR, 249). Despite vanity being considered of secondary importance Lewis sees it as a typically masculine characteristic, writing that the man ‘is blown out by vanity into a *bigger* and *bonier* creature’ than the woman (ABR, 250). In the character of Beresin Lewis had already created a figure ‘blown out by vanity’ into masculinity, and one who, as we shall see, was ‘always likely to collapse’.

One of the ways in which Beresin attempts to perform his aristocratic role and achieve the ‘superiority’ he desires is through the adoption of a violent attitude towards women and sexual relationships with them:

I want a woman so shy that she can hardly bear to be looked at. To undress her would be like tearing a shell off a living crab. Her nudity would be so indecent that I should rush out of the room, at first, in horror. She would at the same moment faint on realizing that she was there – (‘Baby’, 95)

The melodramatic and abstract nature of Beresin’s statement is emphasised by his servant who interrupts his grandiloquence with some earthy and entirely practical advice: ‘I can see you’re in a bad way, old chap. Why don’t you run up to London for a few days?’ (‘Baby’, 95).

Like Cantleman, Beresin consciously and deliberately adopts a sexually aggressive attitude toward women as a means of propping up his vanity, and assuring himself of his active and autonomous role in the world. Both the characters’ attitudes are presented as theoretical ones: neither Beresin nor Cantleman appears to be ‘naturally’ sexually aggressive; rather it is a posture they adopt as a result of their own ‘philosophising’, a means of rationalising their ‘common’ desires in such a way that they can think of themselves as distinct and defiant.

Beresin conveniently finds, or believes that he finds, his ideal woman in the figure of his landlady's daughter, Tets. At first Beresin's 'Nietzschean' methods of courtship are absurdly unsuccessful:

"I kiss you because I don't believe too much in individuals."

"Go hon!"

"I want to know what you taste like, and I want to keep fat."

"You're quite fat enough."

"Kisses take one back six thousand years. It is a delicious journey."

"Don't be so silly."

"But I promise you – ! That's it. Kiss a woman and you become naked at once." His talk of the crab's shell and swooning nudity had got no further. ('Baby', 98-9)

Again we are presented with a comic mismatch of masculine fantasy and feminine reality:

The cheap sententious mysticism of the imperial bard recoiled before the deaf reality of this rather psychic, rather Eastern, young lady. So far did the brave Beresin get and there he unaccountably stuck. Just as the jolliest romances are apt to draw up abashed before too naked realities, so presumably his light-hearted lechery had been damped and cowed to its nursery by the contact of a full being. ('Baby', 99)

Tets's 'deaf reality' here has the same effect as the 'harsh extinction' of the 'death-line': in both cases Beresin finds it impossible to 'luxuriate' his 'aristocratic ideal'. Beresin eventually sexually consummates his relationship with Tets when he receives 'his marching order':

Now the quickened pace, the uprooting process, the quickening of military duties, caused a change in Richard Beresin. He clung to his exquisite habits, burnished his contempt every day and held it coolly up to his fellows with politeness when he considered they had appeared mentally untidy before him. He said his daily prayers to his deities; but even a philosopher should be efficacious. He was going very soon now back to War. How had he spent his spell of leisure? It was not enough of a figure that he had filled this space with to satisfy him. Not conscious of it, the animal things had their way. [...] He became more ostentatiously the jeune signeur that all spirited youth

should be: the natural man swelled and concentrated itself, on the contrary, in equal measure. ('Baby', 99-100)

The split in Beresin's character, between 'ostentation' and 'spirit' and 'the animal things', brought about by the 'death-line' coming closer demonstrates how unsuited his ideals and illusions are to the real situation in which he is unavoidably caught. Beresin invites Tets to London, where, after a night of not-particularly-aristocratic entertainment and 'guzzl[ing]' of 'war-wine', Tets does 'not deny the Bacchanalia its culmination' ('Baby', 100). Their rather artificial 'Bacchanalia' occurs because of the pressure of time caused by the imminence of war rather than because of anything like Beresin's autonomous and masculine free-will:

As they drove through the black streets afterwards they lay in each other's arms and sealed their unwisdom with the ultimate convulsions of love. The eating up of the pennies and yards on the taximeter was an intense and palpable symbol of time. ('Baby', 100)

Although Beresin apparently gets what he wants, these 'convulsions' are hardly a triumph for him, as they were brought about by the 'animal' desires of his 'natural man' having their way over his idea of 'the jeune signeur that all spirited youth should be'. Beresin, like Cairn, finds that his 'spirit' is not 'winged', but 'like his body' and 'grubbily attached' if not to the earth, then to his own 'animal things'. The sexual relationship of Beresin and Tets is presented as being 'grubbily attached' to the war:

The next morning Beresin found a warm mass beside him in bed, and realized, as he would have done at the presence of a pool of blood or a dead body, that the preceding evening had been marked by a human event. The mass stirred, and a cumbrous bestial scented arm passed round his body. In the middle of a thick primitive gush of hair, he found the lips with their thoughtful pathetic spasm. He looked with curiosity and uneasiness at what he found so near to him.

The corpses of the battlefield had perhaps cheapened flesh? Anyway, realities were infectious; and all women seemed to feel that they should have their luxurious battles, too; only they were playing at dying, and their war was fruitful. ('Baby', 100-1)

Even Beresin's 'Bacchanalia' is no escape from 'the harsh extinction' of the war; even here the 'illustrious segregation' he seeks is not achieved due to the 'infectious' nature of reality. Having sex with Tets is not presented as a triumph for Beresin: it does not indicate the achievement of an 'illustrious segregation, a superiority' but rather his unavoidable attachment to the 'human events' and 'realities' which surround him. Sex is seen as the failure of separation rather than as its achievement.

The clearest example of the collapse of Beresin's masculinity is his sexual failure with non-white prostitutes in Egypt. As we might expect, Beresin's attitude to these women is framed in typically aristocratic terms:

he looks round at the Black and the Brown. They, as we all know, help you along with the White. But much more than that, this caviare [*sic*] of a dark and acrid skin is the test, surely, of whether your palate is a noble, an adventurous palate, or a plebeian one! This was perhaps the bitterest pill. Beresin could never bear to think of that failure! ('Baby', 104)

Beresin's failure is not only traumatic in that he temporarily fails to perform the role he has ascribed to himself, but also as it changes his self-perception; it leaves him 'blackened in his own eyes for ever, ethiopianly blackened' ('Baby', 104). Once again Beresin's 'Nietzschean illusion' collapses when faced with reality, and with it the separate and superior status he seeks, a distinction in this case that involves discourses of colonialism and race as well as of gender. Beresin's 'blackening' indicates that he perceives an identity between him and the non-white women he finds so sexually intimidating: once again there is a realisation of a fundamental uniformity, that the (white) man, once his 'arbitrary psychological equipment' has been kicked from underneath him, '*is in reality just the same size, and of just the same sort*' as the (non-white) woman (*ABR*, 250). I am not trying to suggest that Lewis is in any way celebrating human equality; rather he is dramatising its unavoidability,

and finding comedy, and perhaps some repressed tragedy, in the failure of those who would deny or disguise it.

Beresin's 'aristocratic ideal' comes under further pressure when he encounters some 'genuinely' aristocratic officers. This episode is interesting, as it demonstrates just how much Beresin's ideas of aristocracy are psychological and artificial projections, rather than reflections of physical or 'natural' fact:

The short, scrubby physique, the thoroughly villainous stupidity of the noble, who was also his colonel and enemy, appeared to him in the highest sense, peculiarly, attributes. The stupidity, which he also saw, was the divine stupidity of the Noble! The physical commonplace – which he noted – how characteristic, paradoxical, and in fact the "real thing"! ('Baby', 105)

Beresin's failed attempt to 'disguise' himself as a 'soft, subtle, clever, insolent pea' is here projected on those he considers 'genuine' aristocrats, turning the obvious fundamental likeness – they are mentally and physically 'commonplace' – into an image of 'divine' nobility. Unable to maintain his own 'Nietzschean illusion' Beresin tries to delude himself into finding it in others, a 'peculiar' attempt, which only succeeds in creating 'fresh despondencies' for him ('Baby', 105).

The final failure of Beresin's deluded ideals is embodied by his and Tets's baby (Tets dies in childbirth), a 'pulpy and stormy little totem' who soon 'became a dull human being' ('Baby', 108). Beresin unenthusiastically views Tets's pregnancy as an unstoppable natural process: 'Something had been started that nothing could arrest' ('Baby', 103). Beresin sees himself as a victim of this process, using terms that echo Lewis's image of the female epira devouring her mate: 'He goes out on the female hunt; lodges in his trap, incidentally: now he is being slowly devoured by his prey' ('Baby', 104). This transition from activity to passivity, from the hunter of women to their prey, is similar to the one that Rob Cairn, in 'The French Poodle', experienced as shell shock: Beresin discovers that his sexuality, like Cairn's spirit, 'could not disport itself genially in independence of

surrounding objects' ('Baby', 53). Beresin's aggressively masculine sexuality, which formed an important part of the 'Nietzschean illusion' at the heart of his self-definition and attempt at 'an illustrious segregation, a superiority', results in a dependent from which he cannot separate himself. And just as Beresin's aristocraticism was imitative and based on vanity ('he would imitate any figure that would satisfy the natural vanity of a young animal'), so is his baby's behaviour: 'She would attempt to stimulate interest, cause pity, or induce amusement, by mincing or conducting herself in babyish style, to mesmerize you into seeing her "en petit"' ('Baby', 108). This performing baby, the unwanted result of the capitulation of his 'spirit' to his unconscious 'animal things', provides the ultimate and appropriate reply of the feminine and the natural to Beresin's pretensions of superiority. The story ends ironically: 'No aristocrat could have had a less appropriate child!' ('Baby', 108). Just as in 'Cattleman's Spring-Mate' the forces of aspiring masculinity are shown to be comically subordinate to and unconsciously complicit with the realm of the feminine and the natural that they seek to defy. Beresin's attempt at autonomy, for an 'illustrious segregation, a superiority' fails, and not only is he revealed as 'a pea disguising itself from a million other peas', but he becomes the unwilling participant in the propagation of more 'peas'.

Tarr:

‘a grimacing, tumultuous mask’

One of the main themes of Lewis’s novel *Tarr* (1918) is the struggle of Tarr, one of the two central male protagonists, for autonomy, a struggle in which issues of gender and sexuality are crucial. Like Cantleman and Beresin Tarr’s struggle for autonomy has two aspects: he wants to escape from sexual desire and the uncontrollable drives of the body altogether; but he also wants to use the performance of his sexuality to achieve and display his desired autonomy. Sexual desires for and relationships with women are things to be overcome, but this overcoming can be displayed through an involvement with them, by enacting them in a way that demonstrates his disdain for and mastery over them. Tarr’s struggle for autonomy from sex involves a performance of masculinity similar to but more developed than those displayed by Cantleman and Beresin, and is illuminated by comparison with the ideas Lewis put forward in *The Art of Being Ruled*.

Early on in the novel Tarr meets and engages in an argument with Hobson, an acquaintance of his, for whose ‘outfit [Tarr] had the greatest contempt’ (*T*, 22). The argument begins with some schoolboyish teasing, with Tarr pulling Hobson’s hair and asking him when he is going to get it cut (*T*, 23). However, things get more heated when Tarr’s German fiancée, Bertha Lunken, is mentioned. Bertha is introduced into the conversation in an interesting way: Tarr aggressively asks Hobson ‘What on earth possesses you to know so many Germans?’, a question that Hobson throws back at him:

“It seems to me that you know more Germans than I do. = But *you’re ashamed of it*. You do everything you can to hide it. Hence your attack on me a moment ago. = I met a Fräulein Brandenburg the other day, a German, who claimed to know you. I am always meeting Germans who know you. She also referred to you as the ‘official fiancée of Fräulein Lunken.’ = Are you an ‘official fiancée?’ And if so, what is that, may I ask?”

Tarr was taken aback, it was evident.
Hobson laughed stridently. (*T*, 24)

Tarr has been exposed as being 'guilty' of the same vice which he accused Hobson of, something which he finds awkward to respond to:

Tarr was recovering gracefully from his relapse into discomfort. If ever taken off his guard, he made a clever use immediately afterwards of his naïveté. He beamed on his slip. He would swallow it tranquilly, assimilating it, with ostentation, to himself. When some personal weakness slipped out he would pick it up unabashed, look at it smilingly, and put it back in his pocket.

"As you know," he soon replied, "engagement' is an euphemism. And as a matter of fact my girl publicly announced the breaking off of our engagement yesterday."

He looked a complete child, head thrown back as though proclaiming something he had reason to be particularly proud of. = Hobson laughed compulsively, cracking his yellow fingers. (*T*, 24-5)

There is some ambiguity about Tarr's reaction here; the first paragraph would seem to suggest that it is 'graceful'; the last paragraph, in which Tarr is likened to a 'complete child', is less flattering. One of the key stylistic features of *Tarr* is the extremely slippery use of free indirect discourse, so that it becomes difficult to say with any certainty whether we are reading comments of the narrator or the narrated thoughts of characters. I would argue that in the case in question it is the last paragraph that forms a narrative comment on Tarr; the word 'looked' is crucial here, as it suggests a visual and hence exterior, perspective on Tarr, a perspective lacking in the first paragraph. With this reading, the first paragraph can be read as Tarr's own view of his response, and the discrepancy of this with the perspective of the narrator given in last paragraph can be seen as an ironic comment on Tarr, who acts 'as though [...] he had reason to be particularly proud', but, it is heavily hinted, does not.

Tarr's reaction to the 'fundamental likeness' that Hobson has exposed – the fact that they both socialise with Germans – is to rationalise his position in a performance of sexually aggressive masculinity that exceeds those of Cattleman and Beresin in energy as well as scope.

“Sex is a monstrosity. It is the arch abortion of this filthy universe. [...] I am the Panurgic-Pessimist, drunken with the laughing gas of the Abyss. I gaze on squalor and idiocy, and the more I see it, the more I like it. = Flaubert built up his *Bouvard et Pécuchet* with maniacal and tireless hands. It took him ten years. That was a long draught of stodgy laughter from the gases that rise from the dung heap? He had an appetite like an elephant for this form of mirth. But he grumbled and sighed over his food. = I take it in my arms and bury my face in it! [...]

“I bury my face in it!” = (He buried his face in it!!) = “I laugh hoarsely through its thickness, choking and spitting; coughing, sneezing, blowing. = People will begin to think I am an alligator if they see me always swimming in their daily ooze. As far as sex is concerned I am that.[”] (*T*, 26-7)

Tarr claims that the reason for his predilection for a predatory immersion in the ‘ooze’ of sex lies in his artistic nature, which compels him to take an attitude different to the normal, non-artistic man, and which explains and even excuses his ‘engagement’ to Bertha:

[“]I will explain why I am associated sexually with this pumpkin.

“First, I am an artist. = With most people, not describable as artists, all the finer part of their vitality goes into sex. They become third-rate poets during their courtship. All their instinct of drama comes out freshly with their wives. The artist is he in whom this emotionality normally absorbed by sex is so strong that it claims a newer and more exclusive field of development. = Its first creation is *the Artist* himself, a new sort of person; the creative man. [...]

“The tendency of my work, as you may have noticed, is that of an inevitable severity. Apart from its being good or bad, its character is ascetic rather than sensuous, and divorced from immediate life. There is no slop of sex in *that*. But there is no severity left over for the work of the cruder senses either. [...]

“All the delicate psychology another naturally seeks in a woman, the curiosity of form, windows on other lives, I seek in my work and not elsewhere.[”] (*T*, 29-30)

Tarr’s idea here is a variation on the theory that artistic energy is sublimated sexual energy, but for him it is a sublimation of judgment and taste, which leaves his sexual energy intact but indiscriminating.

Tarr's argument serves the purpose of defending himself from his own criticisms: the confrontation with Hobson started when Hobson reflected Tarr's criticism that he knew 'too many' Germans back on Tarr, supplemented with the observation that as well as knowing Germans Tarr was sexually involved with and engaged to one. Tarr's argument is a reaction to his own criticism of others, criticisms which he himself cannot withstand, and it is in this context that it should be understood. Faced with a similarity – both he and Hobson know 'too many' Germans – Tarr attempts to establish a difference. Indeed, he attempts to elevate this difference to a superiority by asserting that his behaviour is not just a case of normal and non-artistic sexual desire but a deliberate predatory immersion that indicates his artistic nature. Tarr's vision of himself as an artist and sexual alligator is a rationalisation of the same type as Cattleman's deluded 'ideas of defiance' ('Spring-Mate', 83), which ignores the fact that he is in the same immersed position as 'most people, not describable as artists', with the only difference being that he retrospectively claims that he chose to be there, and that his 'choice' is a mark of distinction. The idea that Tarr's outburst is a performance, rather than, say, an expression of his innermost being, is reinforced by the comment that 'Tarr needed a grimacing, tumultuous mask for the face he had to cover. = The clown was the only rôle that was ample enough' (*T*, 29). Like Beresin, Tarr is only 'a pea disguising itself from a million other peas', and he fears that Hobson may have given him 'that deadly look that one pea gives another when pretence is laid aside' ('Baby', 94).

In his book *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* (1991), Michael Levenson analyzes the way individuality is represented in *Tarr* and sees performance as playing a central role:

Personality is a theatre-prop in a drama staged by the imagination, and in this respect Lewis anticipates a perception that has become a sociological commonplace: that identity is a part one plays; one plays at being oneself. Lewis gives that idea a turn towards the macabre. His characters are consistently betrayed by the roles they have chosen; the drama never goes as planned, with the result that

characters are left staring blankly at the costumes they have donned.¹³

This sense that personality is performed has its roots in Lewis's response to the Great War: the 'turn towards the macabre' and the sense that 'the drama never goes as planned' that Levenson writes of, can be seen to be prefigured in the war stories, where the 'spirit' fails to 'disport itself genially', and where the individual is shown as not in control of himself. As Levenson writes, 'Lewis submits the helpless mind to the exactions of matter, leaving little for consciousness to do but witness its own degradation'¹⁴: a process that mirrors the collapse of the fantasy of masculine autonomy in the First World War.

Tarr's helplessness and lack of self-control is shown when, after his confrontation with Hobson and similar conversations with two other male friends, he visits Bertha with the intention of decisively leaving her, something which he finds he cannot do (*T*, 49-73). He explains his inability to leave Bertha to himself using imagery which suggests some sort of physical conjoinment:

His tenderness for Bertha was due to her having purloined some part of himself, and covered herself superficially with it as a shield. Her skin at least was Tarr. She had captured a bit of him, and held it as a hostage. She was rapidly transforming herself, too, into a slavish dependence. She worked with all the hypocrisy of a great instinct.

People can wound by loving; the sympathy of this affection is interpenetrative. Love performs its natural miracle, and they become part of us; it is a dismemberment to cast them off. Our own blood flows out after them when they go. (*T*, 72)

This account of Tarr's involvement with Bertha contrasts with his earlier claim that he 'buries' his face in the 'monstrosity' of sex, and that he should be seen by others as an 'alligator [...] swimming in their daily ooze' (*T*, 27). Whereas the earlier images suggest an active and willed immersion in sex,

¹³ Micheal Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). p. 128.

¹⁴ Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, p. 129.

the later image suggests that his 'interpenetrative' mingling with Bertha is a result of the 'natural miracle' of love, rather than his own aggressive volition. This idea of love is closer to Samuel Butler's 'a grinding out of all differences', an idea that as we have seen Lewis attacked in *The Art of Being Ruled*, than Tarr's own ideal (see above and *ABR*, 226-32). That his relationship with Bertha is 'interpenetrative' also undermines the implied masculinity of the 'alligator' image: Tarr wants to think that he enters the 'ooze' deliberately, but it becomes clear that the 'ooze' has also entered him, a penetration he cannot resist and which undermines his 'will' to leave Bertha. Tarr's belief that, unlike the crowd-like Hobson, he is an individual is shown here to be false: like Arghol in *Enemy of the Stars* Tarr finds that he is 'Always a deux!' (*B1*, 80).

The rhetoric of dualism, a feature of Lewis's work discussed in Chapter Two, appears in *Tarr* in an often quoted passage: Tarr, contemplating his relationship with Anastasya, sets out what could be called an ontological hierarchy of gender:

Woman and the sexual sphere seemed to him to be an average from which *everything* came: from it everything rose, or attempted to rise. = There was no mysterious opposition extending up into Heaven, and dividing Heavenly Beings into Gods and Goddesses. There was only one God and he was a man. = A woman was a lower form of life. Everything was female to begin with. A jellyish diffuseness spread itself and gaped on the beds and in the bas-fonds of everything. Above a certain level of life sex disappeared, just as in highly organised sensualism sex vanishes. And, on the other hand, *everything* beneath that line was female. = Bard, Simpson, MacKenzie, Townsend, Annandale – he enumerated acquaintances evidently below the absolute line and who displayed a lack of energy, permanently mesmeric state, and almost purely emotional reactions. He knew that everything on the superior side of the line was not purged of jellyish attributes; also that Anastasya's flaccid and fundamental charms were formidable, although the line has been crossed by her. (*T*, 313-4)

This passage is intriguing, as even though the gendered ontology it proposes appears to be clear cut its exact application to the characters in the novel is typically unclear. Despite images that suggest a typical

misogynist disgust at the female body – ‘jellyish’ being the most obvious – the fact that acquaintances of Tarr who are presumably male are placed on the feminine side of the ‘line’ indicates that this scheme is significantly different from traditional biological views of sexual difference. Fredric Jameson’s interpretation of this passage is interesting:

It should be noted that while women, the organic, and sex itself are here all identified within a mythic, clearly negative term, there is no correlative celebration of the male principle. The peculiarity of Lewis’ sexual ideology is that, while openly misogynist, and sexist in the obvious senses of the word, it is not for all that phallogentric. The positive term which logically corresponds to the negative one of the female is not the male, as in D. H. Lawrence, but rather art, which is not the place of a subject, masculine or otherwise, but rather impersonal and inhuman [...].¹⁵

This reading suggests a link between this passage and Lewis’s ideas of gender in *The Art of Being Ruled*, ideas which Jameson unfortunately does not discuss, where masculinity is seen as artificial and associated with ‘the spirit of the artist’ (see above and *ABR*, 232). Jameson’s distinction between the ideas of masculinity and of ‘impersonal and inhuman’ art is unnecessary as for Lewis they were practically identical. However, he is right to say that Lewis’s positive term does not ‘logically correspond’ to the female, as for Lewis masculinity and femininity are not two fundamentally different and opposed types of existence. Rather masculinity is seen as a supplemented femininity; using Žižek’s terms, the ‘reality’ of masculinity is nothing more than ‘the Real’ of the feminine mediated by the ‘arbitrary psychological machinery’ of belief in the masculine personality. As Lewis says, ‘Everything was female to begin with’, the masculine being merely something ‘propped up’ from this fundamental state. Although the identification of women with the organic is, as Jameson says, ‘openly misogynist, and sexist in the obvious senses of the word’, Tarr’s gendered ontology is not without anxiety for the male, as it both allows the possibility that men can fall below the ‘line’ into the feminine, and that

¹⁵ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, p. 97.

women can cross the 'line' into the masculine, something Tarr considers Anastasya to have done.

Tarr's feeling that Anastasya has 'crossed the line' and become masculine is not completely mistaken, as Anastasya is in some ways the most masculine character in the novel, the most independent, intelligent, and sexually dominant, all characteristics that Tarr and Lewis himself idealise as masculine. Anastasya's disruption of stereotypical thinking on gender is demonstrated by Sara Danius's bizarre misreading of an episode in *Tarr* in her book *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (2002). Danius writes that in *Tarr* 'the gazer is male and the gazed-upon female', adding that 'In modernism at large, the alienating and reifying gaze is usually associated with masculinity'.¹⁶ However, if we take the trouble to actually read the passage Danius is referring to, we discover that the 'gazer' is in fact female and the 'gazed-upon' male:

He had already been examined by the beautiful girl. Throwing an absent far-away look into her eyes, she let them wonder over him. Afterwards she cast them down into her soup. As a pickpocket, after brisk work in a crowd, hurries home to examine and evaluate his spoil, so she then collected what her dreamy eyes had noted. (*T*, 98)

Despite the fact that the 'gazer' is female, the gaze itself is gendered as male – the 'pickpocket' examines 'his spoil' – which would suggest that something is going on here that does not fit easily into 'modernism at large' – or at least Danius's account of it. This episode would seem to be an example of Anastasya, or at least one part of her, 'crossing the line' in the way that Tarr, and sophisticated twenty-first-century criticism, finds disturbing.

Anastasya's feminine identity, which is heavily sexual and captivates both Tarr and Kreisler, is characterised as a result of performance: 'She seemed to feel herself a travelling circus of tricks and wonders, beauty shows and monstrosities. Quite used to being looked at, she had become

¹⁶ Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 160.

resigned to inability to avoid performing' (T, 100). In his book *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde: Nation and Empire 1901-1918*, Paul Peppis argues that as 'the passivity of this language confirms, Anastasya's facility as a performer is the result of being made the subject and locus of male desire'.¹⁷ However, the image of Anastasya's gaze as male seems to complicate this interpretation as it suggests that in terms of gender her identity is not unitary but fragmented and contradictory: her gaze is male, but 'her' eyes are femininely 'dreamy'. Anastasya's performed identity does not simply enhance and develop her given biological identity but exceeds it, allowing part of her to function in a masculine way: although in general she 'acts the woman' her gaze 'acts the man'. This performance of the masculine gaze also calls into question the notion of 'male desire': if Anastasya can look at men with a masculine gaze perhaps she can also desire them in a masculine way as well?

Anastasya's disruption of the typical male-'gazer'/female-'gazed-upon' dualism can also be seen later on in the novel, when she actively initiates sexual relations with Tarr. After an evening of drinking and arguments about art and life, Tarr and Anastasya go their separate ways; Tarr returns home to find that he has lost his key, but that his front door is open; inside his flat he finds Anastasya naked, and 'laughing with a harsh sound like stone laughing'; she suggestively offers to 'model' for him, an offer which, although he briefly prevaricates over, he does not refuse (T, 306-7). This scene is similar to Kreisler's rape of Bertha earlier on in the novel: in both cases, 'modelling' is the pretext for sex, but whereas in the earlier scene the painter forces himself on the model, in the second scene the relationship is reversed, with Anastasya taking the leading role, although she does not actually rape Tarr. Anastasya's deflation of Tarr's masculine bubble is made clear in their conversation the following morning, during which Tarr declares to Anastasya:

"I am your slave!"

¹⁷ Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde: Nation and Empire 1901-1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 151.

Anastasya rolled up against him with the movement of a seal.
“Thank you, Tarr. That’s better than *having* a slave, isn’t it?”
“Yes, I think everything is in order.”
“Then you’re my efficient chimpanzee?”
“No, I’m the new animal; we haven’t found a name for it yet. It will succeed the Superman. Back to the Earth!”
“Jean-Jacques Rousseau. = Kiss me!” (T, 307)

Not only does Tarr accept the role of slave – not part of the philosophy he expounded to Hobson – but his ‘Nietzschean illusion’, his claim that he is ‘the new animal’ which ‘will succeed the Superman’, is ridiculed, albeit with some affection, by Anastasya. The reference to Rousseau is interesting, as in *The Art of Being Ruled* his ‘super-agriculturalist dreams’ and ‘Pictures of the “freedom” of the noble savage and the child’ were seen as the ideas of natural freedom under which Europeans paradoxically ‘enslav[ed] themselves more thoroughly’ (ABR, 41-2). Tarr seems to have undergone a similar process, although under the banner of Nietzsche rather than Rousseau. Like Cattleman’s hopes that he ‘might produce a new human chemistry’ Tarr’s Nietzschean aspirations collapse in the face of the feminine. The failure of Tarr’s avant-garde and masculine hopes is consolidated by his marriage to Bertha – the German ‘pumpkin’ to whom he was embarrassed about being engaged to at the start of the novel – who is pregnant with Kreisler’s child (T, 318). The marriage of Tarr and Bertha is very much one of convenience, arranged in order to legitimise Bertha’s child and to prevent her falling foul of established social convention. In terms of Tarr’s initial philosophy the marriage can be seen as a capitulation to both the feminine and the social, and does not seem to further his ambition to ‘succeed the Superman’.

The ultimate collapse of Tarr’s masculinity and the failure of his attempt at autonomy is evident in the last paragraphs of the novel:

Two years after the birth of the child, Mrs. Tarr divorced him. She then married an eye-doctor, and lived with a brooding severity in his company and that of her only child.

Tarr and Anastasya did not marry. = They had no children.

Tarr, however, had three children by a lady of the name of Rose Fawcett, who consoled him eventually for the splendours of his “perfect woman.” = But yet beyond the dim though solid figure of Rose Fawcett, another rises. This one represents the swing back of the pendulum once more to the swagger side. The cheerless and stodgy absurdity of Rose Fawcett required the painted, fine and inquiring face of Prism Dirkes. (*T*, 320)

Fredric Jameson writes that ‘the only way to read the novel’s enigmatic, unresolved final paragraph’ is as ‘the triumph of the sexual term, which can be described as the dreary and cyclical repetition of the organic, a meaningless succession of sex acts’¹⁸. I would again slightly modify Jameson’s interpretation, using the terms discussed in Chapter One, and read the conclusion of the novel as the triumph of ‘the Real’ of femininity over the constructed ‘reality’ of the masculine personality which Tarr attempts to maintain through his clownish performances and spurious rationalisations. Tarr certainly does not, as Alistair Davies has argued, achieve a Nietzschean ‘creative Selfhood’ and ‘joyful wisdom’¹⁹: the novel tells a story of toppling over rather than of overcoming.

In *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis wrote that ‘Absence of responsibility, an automatic and stereotyped rhythm is what most men desire for themselves’, adding that ‘possession of the self is not compatible with a set rhythm’ (*ABR*, 130). The automatism of Tarr’s pendulum-like swinging between two types of women seems to suggest that even he, the self-proclaimed ‘individual’, ‘alligator’, and successor to Nietzsche’s Superman, ends up in such a ‘set rhythm’, and consequently that he does not possess a ‘self’. Tarr, the avant-garde artist struggling for autonomy from the ‘monstrosity’ of sex and the ‘foul haunting’ of women, ends up by achieving the sort of ‘freedom’ characterised in *The Art of Being Ruled* as ‘feminine’. His confession to Anastasya that he is her ‘slave’ reveals the truth of the Tarr’s character: in the terms of *The Art of Being Ruled* Tarr is one of the ‘ruled’ and not a ‘ruler’. In *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis

¹⁸ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, pp. 101-2.

¹⁹ Alistair Davies, ‘Tarr: A Nietzschean Novel’, in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1980), p. 118.

imagines ‘the really sensible woman’ saying to herself ‘How enjoyable to be a slave! [...] How divine to have a master!’ (*ABR*, 132), and this is the lesson that Anastasya, the only ‘really sensible’ person in the novel, teaches Tarr when she affirms that being a slave is ‘better than *having a slave*’ (*T*, 307). The ending of *Tarr* follows that pattern of the ‘collapse of masculinity’ that we have seen conceptualised in *The Art of Being Ruled* and fictionalised in Lewis’s stories of the First World War. This collapse of Tarr’s masculinity into the ‘stereotyped rhythm’ of ‘feminine freedom’ testifies to the anxiety inherent in the book’s more easily noticeable misogyny. Anne Quéma, in her book *The Agon Of Modernism: Wyndham Lewis’s Allegories, Aesthetics, and Politics* (1999), argues that, despite Lewis’s protests that his idea of femininity was detached from real existing females, or in other words that his idea of gender was cultural and so independent of biological sex, ‘It is obvious that [...] “female” and “feminine” are synonymous in his vocabulary’.²⁰ However, the narratives of *Tarr* and the war stories, as well as the arguments of *The Art of Being Ruled*, also make ‘obvious’ that ‘male’ and ‘masculine’ are not so consistently synonymous, and that, to use Tarr’s image, men do not always succeed in their attempt to rise from ‘the average from which *everything* came’ and often remain part of the feminine ‘jellyish diffuseness’.

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, this anxiety about masculinity introduces an anxiety into Lewis’s ideas of the ‘rulers’: if the ‘ruled are the females and the ruled the males’ then they are ‘*in reality just the same size, and of just the same sort*’ (*ABR*, 92, 250). Tarr’s collapse into the ‘stereotyped rhythm’ of ‘feminine freedom’ is also a collapse into ‘what most men desire for themselves’. Like those who Lewis disparagingly refers to as the ‘masses of slowly, painfully, moving people’ Tarr’s idea of freedom takes a ‘violent, super-real prospect’ as, like them, he is ‘not to the manner born where “freedom” is concerned: and so [he] invariably

²⁰ Anne Quéma, *The Agon Of Modernism: Wyndham Lewis’s Allegories, Aesthetics, and Politics*, (Lewisburg, Pa.; Cranbury, NJ.: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1999), p. 90

overplay[s] it' (*ABR*, 42). The figure of the ruler would appear to be, to reuse Jameson's phrase, 'a dead letter [...] which no narrative [...] can concretely generate'. As I have shown in this chapter, not only is this figure not generated by Lewis's narratives, but the seemingly inevitable failure of those who aspire to such a position is ridiculed. The question remains, however, whether, precisely by means of this ridiculing, Lewis tries to recuperate the masculinity portrayed as lost in his narratives on a stylistic level; whether his satirical vision is an attempt to achieve Tarr's ideal style: one of 'an inevitable severity [...] ascetic rather than sensuous, and divorced from immediate life' with 'no slop of sex' in it (*T*, 30). Whether or not Lewis's style achieves this, it is clear that the gendered body does not function as a solid ground for identity in Lewis's work. Indeed, the body is seen as intrinsically feminine, and masculinity and gender difference in general are seen as unnatural supplements to a natural state of feminine materiality. Lewis's decoupling of gender and biology does not just produce the anxiety and comedy of masculine failure, it also raises the prospect of women 'crossing the line' into the idealised and incorporeal state of masculinity.

Chapter Four: Race

In this chapter I am going to examine how Lewis's attitudes towards and use of the concept of race changed between the mid 1920s and the late 1940s. I will look in detail at parts of five books in which the concept of race played an important part: *The Lion and the Fox* (1927), *Paleface* (1929), *Hitler* (1931), *The Hitler Cult* (1939), and *America and Cosmic Man* (1948). I will argue that Lewis's attitude toward the concept of race is ambivalent: on the one hand, he finds many of its basic theoretical assumptions unacceptable, on the other, he seems to find useful and even enjoy the language of race; and so the rhetoric of race is retained in his work, even as the theory of race is denied. In terms of the grounding of identity I will argue that although race does not operate as an unambiguously solid ground for Lewis, it is not abandoned altogether. Race, like the peons in *The Childermass*, both collapses and reassembles in Lewis's work.

I am going to concentrate my analysis on Lewis's treatment of race as a theoretical category, rather than do what some previous critics have done and simply catalogue various offensive racial stereotypes that he used: I hope that this approach will achieve a deeper understanding of Lewis's attitude towards the idea of race and his relationship to mainstream modern racism.

Central to the concept of race is the issue of racial differentiation: it is clear that any racial thought contains within it an idea of the existence of different races, and so the question of Lewis's notions of exactly what it is that differentiates between races, what attributes and values signal those differences, and the basis – scientific, philosophical, or political – that underpins the differentiation, is, or rather should be, inseparable from the question of his racism. In this chapter I shall be looking not only at Lewis's

racial rhetoric but also at the theory of race that underpins such expression. Attention to this issue of differentiation is vital to an understanding of Lewis's attitudes toward race because, as David Theo Goldberg has written, 'racialized discourse does not consist simply in descriptive representations of others. It includes a set of hypothetical premises about human kinds [...] and about the differences between them'.¹ The analysis of Lewis's 'hypothetical premises about human kinds' is essential, for without understanding exactly how Lewis viewed and constructed in his writing the differences between different human groups any discussion of the values he subsequently attributes to those groups will be conducted with an unconscious and unargued assumption that a particular method of differentiation is at work.

In his book *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (1993), David Theo Goldberg writes that there are 'two general forms' of twentieth-century thought on race, the first of which 'accepts the standard biological sense of race as subspecies genetically interpreted, of race as natural kind' and:

attempts to explain relations between real racial groups so interpreted [...] by reducing the racialized phenomena to underlying social (or in some cases biological) terms or relations. These underlying terms are deemed more primary, more universal, more constitutive or basically motivating, and more fundamentally determining of social structure.²

This strand of thought rests on the assumptions that social relations are the result of a deeper underlying reality which can function as interpretive key to other, less 'primary', realities. Race is in this interpretation a deep cause, as opposed to the more superficial and artificial nature of such purely social phenomena such as class.

The other 'explanatory paradigm', Goldberg writes, 'gives no independent content to the notion of race'; rather, it 'takes race as a social

¹ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 47.

² Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, p. 69.

kind and interprets appeals to race as nothing other than recourse to social considerations and relations, again, like class or culture.’ In this view race is seen as lacking any ‘determining or motivational force of its own’ and ‘any appeal to race is seen as mystificatory, a form of (self-deceived) false consciousness or misleading ideology.’ To summarise, ‘the first paradigm reifies race as an unquestioned biological given, the second conceives race and racial characterization of social relations as ghostlike.’³

What makes Lewis’s racial discourse interesting is that he seems to combine elements of both these strands in his thinking, at times representing race as something that is primary and ‘fundamentally determining of social structure’, at others explicitly regarding it as ‘ghostlike’ and ‘mystifactory’. This ambivalence at the centre of his thinking on race is attributable to an identical ambivalence in his thoughts on the reality of body: as we have seen, he attempted to repress ‘the Real’ of the body while maintaining a sense of its ‘reality’, and so Lewis’s representations of the body vacillate between the disgustedly and precisely visceral and the abstract and insubstantial. Ideas of the body are central to the idea of race, for, as Goldberg writes, ‘racialized discourse may be seen to acquire unity in terms of bodily relations’ and ‘racist expression assumes authority and is vested with power, literally and symbolically, in bodily terms.’⁴ Given Lewis’s denaturalisation of the body and the way in which it is treated imaginatively in his fiction and painting – fragmented, mechanised, animalised, politicised – it should be clear that his use of a discourse and mode of expression to which the body is central is going to be problematic – Lewis’s body is not the same body as that of nineteenth-century science. One of the key issues on which Lewis’s view of the body differs from that of mainstream modern racism is the assumption that the physical body and its appearance and attributes expresses in some way the quality of the mind. As we have already seen in the second chapter the mind-body question was a difficult one for Lewis as he was both attracted by and extremely anxious about the idea that the minds of human beings

³ Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, p. 69.

⁴ Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, p. 53, p. 54.

were reducible to a purely material ground. Modern racism, as developed out of and by the human sciences of the Enlightenment, was far less uncertain on this point, as George L. Mosse has pointed out:

the quest for unity and harmony in the affairs of man and the cosmos led to belief in the unity of body and mind. This, in turn, was supposed to express itself in a tangible, physical way, which could be measured and observed.⁵

In this context, the idea of race gains its appeal from being, or appearing to be, an entirely rational way of explaining difference and of gaining an assurance that beneath the apparently disparate and disunited social world of modernity there is actually after all some sort of order and what appears to be chaotic can, in fact, be explained. Science, with its emphasis on objective truths and its self-proclaimed autonomy from the social sphere, would seem to be an ideal guarantor of such unity and epistemological certainty in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, Lewis more often sees science as being an active agent in the disintegration of the man-world relationship that he sees occurring in modernity. Far from being a bulwark against the disintegration of modernity science had become, for Lewis, very much part of the problem.⁶

However, even though Lewis was at odds with some of the theoretical presuppositions of racial discourse that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries he could still make use of the racist expressions and prejudices that developed out of it. Racism can be seen to have, to put it simplistically, a theoretical and a rhetorical aspect which historically developed together but which can, as times change, separate from each other, allowing the rhetoric of racism to still be used even as the concept of race is being theoretically dismissed. The imaginative appeal and linguistic usefulness of a concept can survive the theoretical discrediting or

⁵ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, (London, Melbourne & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1978), p. 2

⁶ See, for example, *ABR*, 24, and *TWM*, 381-95.

disavowal of the concept itself, and continue to provide great rhetorical resources even to those who would seem to be theoretically opposed to it.

The Lion and the Fox:

‘all personality, is raceless for practical purposes’

The questions of the reality of race and of its importance in determining subjectivity and creativity, as well as questions of the relative importance of class and nationality, are explored in the appendix to *The Lion and the Fox: The Rôle of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (1927), which is titled ‘Shakespeare and Race’. In the introduction to *The Lion and the Fox* Lewis comments that:

The Appendix may seem unnecessarily remote from the ostensible object of the book: but it greatly serves to effect the necessary isolation of Shakespeare’s personality; it disposes of the claim of some vague blood, of a legendary flesh and bone, on this singular mind [...]. (*LF*, 11)

The issue of race is being brought into the picture rather apologetically and for a slightly strange purpose: although it may seem remote from the topic of Shakespeare’s genius, Lewis argues, race as an explanation of genius in general needs to be discussed here in order that it might be disposed of, and so that the mind of Shakespeare can have its isolated autonomy re-emphasised. Race is significant to the argument of *The Lion and the Fox* precisely because it is insignificant, or rather, as becomes apparent, because Lewis believes that its significance has been wrongly overstated in influential accounts of Shakespeare, in particular that of Matthew Arnold. Rather than seeking the source of Shakespeare’s genius in his race, which is what he accuses Arnold of doing, Lewis locates it in Shakespeare’s negation of his racial background, a feature of genius that Lewis generalises:

Not only genius [...] but all personality, is raceless for practical purposes: for the characteristic work of personality is to overcome the mechanical ascendancy of what is imposed on it by birth and environment. So, since it illustrates itself by triumph over race, class and fashion, these things are rather what it is *not*, than what it is. (*LF*, 295-6)

In this account race is grouped together with class and fashion, phenomena which are not normally seen as so directly related to biological nature as race, as the heteronomous factors from which 'personality' frees itself. Race is seen as a determining force opposed to the autonomy of the 'personality', as one of the many impositions on the self by external pressures that the self must overcome in order to become autonomous. However, this autonomy does not take the form of a simple opposition, but something more like a dialectical progression or *aufhebung*, in which the autonomous 'personality' is not *a priori* opposed to the heteronomy of race as an abstract principle, but has to do work in order to become autonomous of it, a task for which the tools and energy it uses are provided by that which it opposes itself to: 'in this struggle [personality] uses aptitudes and forces that it derives from the things it is destined to combat' (*LF*, 296).

This overcoming of 'race, class and fashion' is a version of Lewis's mind-body drama in which the mind seeks to separate itself from the body of which it is a part, and to which, in its freedom, it becomes opposed. Lewis's argument is not that the racialised body as a determining biological ground for consciousness and identity does not exist; it is that the biological can, through the work of the 'personality', cease to exist as a determining factor for a select few:

A man's race is the most interesting thing about him, usually – class is a parvenu category compared to it. But Shakespeare's race (not his nation), if we knew it, would not be the most interesting thing about him. [...] In Shakespeare's case there is less temptation than in that of almost anybody to occupy ourselves with where he came from: for where he got to is a matter of such great and universal interest that it would be sure to dwarf his origins, as it dwarfed his immediate environment. However far back you went down the stream of his blood, you would not be likely to meet anything so worth your attention (however picturesque) as himself. (*LF*, 295-6)

The distinction that is made here between men for whom race is 'usually' the 'most interesting thing' about them, and those men for whom race is

not, makes clear that Lewis's vision of the negation of race by 'personality' does not extend to the progressive universalism that a superficial reading might suggest, as 'personality' is not seen as a universal human attribute. Race is still very much the basis of a hierarchical differentiation between different types of men but the grounds for the difference is now not between superior and inferior races but between those with race and those who, by dint of their 'personality', have negated it and become raceless. This re-formulated racially based prejudice is made clear when Lewis writes of his:

suspicion that very strong race-characteristics in an individual, in their face, gait or mental disposition, probably means, at all events to-day, that they are not the highest examples of their kind; that had they been more creative and mentally active they would not have been content to *repeat* – even physiologically: nor would they have followed mechanically the rules laid down by nature and humdrum tradition. (*LF*, 297-8)

The association of 'nature and humdrum tradition' here reinforces the way in which, in *The Lion and the Fox* at least, Lewis associates the biological with the socially banal and everyday, and his assertion that the 'more creative and mentally active [are] not [...] content to *repeat* – even physiologically' suggests that the person possessed of 'personality' or 'genius' does not only escape social convention but physiological convention as well. What this willed non-repetition of the typical 'race-characteristics' actually means or looks like in practice Lewis unfortunately does not explain.

The association of the idea of race with repetition and 'humdrum tradition' and the opposition of all these ideas to that of 'genius' or 'personality' reveals the cultural-political basis for Lewis's antipathy to race here: as race is essentially a collective category and one to which individuals belong irrevocably by the fact of their birth, it defines the individual through their relations to others and is not a self-generated identity, and so denies the autonomy of the creative individual. This essentially heteronomous nature of race, when used as a category for

cultural criticism is seen as an idea which lays claim to the true possession of individual 'genius' and which denies the autonomy of 'personality'. Race is seen by Lewis as a tool of the collectivist and depersonalising tendencies of modernity, another mindless 'inferior religion', a point that he makes quite clear, writing that he approaches the question of race 'as a factor in the programme of depersonalization' (*LF*, 300). Race performs such a function because it provides an explanation for the inexplicable and individual genius of 'personalities' by transferring the responsibility for such genius to a collective, rather than individual, agency:

If a whole race could be found to have conspired in such a result as Shakespeare, then such a monstrosity would no longer offend. Or if such greatness could be transferred to the shoulders of a race [...] then in a sense "greatness" [...] has been explained: or rather, pushed so far back, and so dispersed, it no longer requires explaining. (*LF*, 300)

Lewis's rejection of race is motivated by his dislike for other people taking credit for the artistic achievements of 'personalities', a category in which he surely included himself as well as Shakespeare. Lewis saw Shakespeare's emergence in England as proof of the claims of 'personality' against those of race:

He is the greatest poet in the world; and here he is, pat, just where he ought not to be, in the middle of an extensive plain, with nothing in the surrounding landscape to provide the slightest physical explanation of how he got there. When in the midst of such a community as the Saxon-English such a personality as Shakespeare arises, then there can no longer be any doubt at all – there is such a thing as a person after all, and in spite of most people's persistent wish that that may be disproved. (*LF*, 300-1)

Race, in Lewis's eyes, tends to explain phenomena which do not have the 'slightest physical explanation' and which he thinks should remain unexplained and mysterious, perhaps even in some sense spiritual. It is important to note that he does not reject race altogether: as we have seen,

for those without 'genius' or 'personality' race, it is implied, is still 'the most interesting thing about' them.

This idea that the basic difference between people is that between those with race and those who have negated race provides a fine example of the disparity between Lewis's theory and rhetoric of race. After arguing the non-racial basis for Shakespeare's genius, Lewis goes on to attack Matthew Arnold's book *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), in which, Lewis writes, 'you get [the racial] delusion presented in perhaps its craziest and most magnificent form. You get in Arnold, in its purest form, the pseudo-racial contrast' (LF, 302). Lewis goes on to criticise the book even further, writing that:

Ethnologically, it is true, Arnold's book is worthless: he was not even a great student of celtic literature. He only went to the "Celt" hurriedly, on a political mission, to get ammunition for his war with the "creeping Saxon." (LF, 306)

The point Lewis is making here is that the Celt as presented by Arnold is a political construction rather than an ethnological reality and that what is presented as a race is merely a concept used for an ideological purpose. However, Arnold's Celt is not rejected completely, and Lewis goes on to write that:

The only thing in german or latin Europe possessing mysterious power and expressing itself with a lovely faultlessness – whether you call it "celtic" or leave it merely as an exhalation having its seat along the western fringes which were the extreme landmarks of the ancient world, influencing the people who settled these like some drug in the air – is saluted by Arnold. That he salutes it by the name of "Celt" is unfortunate: but what he says, apart from this, is admirably true. (LF, 307)

It is not Arnold's values that Lewis is opposed to, but the ground which he uses to explain their emergence – race, and the name with which he 'salutes' them – Celt. Lewis rejects any sort of physical or racial cause for the 'Celtic' values, claiming instead, as with Shakespeare, that their 'genius'

came from the transcendence of both the body and race. The name 'Celt' is retained but modified by Lewis to represent something disembodied rather than something grounded in race and the racialised body: 'It was the disincarnate quality of the fastidious knightliness of welsh myth that enabled every country to adopt it at once [...]. It was as spirits, not as men, that these patterns of knighthood descended upon Europe' (*LF*, 309).

The fact that for 'whatever the reason, they had disposed of all trace of race, of feudal machinery, and indeed terrestrial reference altogether' was seen by Lewis as 'the secret of the celtic success' (*LF*, 309). The argument here is basically the same one used about Shakespeare and his 'triumph over race, class and fashion' but whereas in the case of Shakespeare it was an individual that triumphed over race, in the case of the 'celtic success' it appears to be a collective group that triumphed over race. What exactly the difference is between Lewis's idea of a collective group formed by their environment and Arnold's idea of race is unclear. Given that Lewis wrote that it was 'unfortunate' that Arnold saluted the 'celtic' values of chivalry by the name of 'Celt' it seems bizarre that Lewis, two pages on, is doing exactly the same thing and referring to the 'celtic success' rather than, say, the 'chivalric success', and so retaining the racial category that he criticised Arnold for using. In this contradiction we can see the disparity between the theory and the rhetoric of Lewis's thought on race: as much as Lewis wants to get away from the 'pseudo-racial contrast' of Arnold's criticism, it seems that he has not yet developed an alternative, non-racial, vocabulary of his own with which to discuss such cultural developments and differences. This situation brings back to mind Jameson's description of Lewis's literary practice, in which, he writes, the 'modernist renewal must be effectuated within the confines of dead storytelling conventions which remain massively in place, in a world already overinfected with culture and dead forms and with a stifling weight of dead ideas.'⁷ If 'cultural-critical' is substituted for the word 'storytelling' we have an accurate description of Lewis's relation to Arnold, at least in

⁷ Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979), p. 65.

the appendix to *The Lion and the Fox*, with race as one of the 'dead ideas' that Lewis's attempted critical renewal is weighed down by. However, Lewis is not only 'weighed down' by the ideas of race, but actively uses some of the rhetoric of race in his criticism. His opposition to Arnold's theory of race does not extend to a rejection of the rhetoric of race in cases where its imaginative resources can be used for Lewis's own ends. For example, Lewis might dismiss Arnold's racial idea of the Celt but he does not do the same to the 'creeping Saxon', the complement and opposite to the Celt in Arnold's schema. In this case Lewis is far less uneasy with using Arnold's racial term: in the same passage in which he writes disparagingly of the 'pseudo-racial contrast' in Arnold's writing and Arnold's idea of 'what is known as a "Celt"', he writes that 'a considerable reality must certainly be conceded' to Arnold's 'creeping Saxon' (*LF*, 302). This initial dismissal of the racial category of the 'Celt' and the retention to some degree of the 'creeping Saxon' suggests that Lewis is more comfortable with the use of race in a derogatory sense than in a positive one: lack of culture can be ascribed to race, the possession of culture cannot.

However, race is retained not only as a derogatory category: Lewis sees the attainment of such genius as Shakespeare's as rare and so he admits that 'race is a very great reality' and goes on to speculate as to its influence on creative achievements that, however highly he rates them, he considers to be inferior to Shakespeare's, writing of 'How amusing it is, for instance, to speculate whether the pictorial attainments of the modern Jew has its rationale in the turanian intermixture, showing itself so often in the features of jewish immigrants' (*LF*, 298). This 'amusement' suggests that Lewis's re-formulated racial thinking can tend result in the same old value judgements about the inferior, completely racialised, and thus de-individualised, achievements of Jews. However, the second example he gives of art where 'race is a very great reality' is 'the ethnologic question mark' of 'renaissance Italy', whose artistic achievements, he implies, were due to the 'largely oriental slave population' that 'far out-numbered the native Romans' and which 'left huge deposits of human stocks, opposite to those provided by the northern invasion' (*LF*, 298). The emphasis on the

racial mixture in the Roman and modern Jewish populations is not one that most European racists of the period would have made, and he goes on to make plain that 'intermixture' is linked to creativity, writing that 'Any analysis of a great creative period – and we are concerned with that too – must have this chaotic spot in its centre: the incalculable factor of racial intermixture' (*LF*, 298).

This positive view of 'intermixture' is the logical outcome of his previous assertion that the 'more creative and mentally active [are] not [...] content to *repeat* – even physiologically', as the issue of such 'intermixture', commonly seen as being not one thing nor another, can also be seen as being something new. By negating in some way the racial characteristics of both 'parent' races the product of 'intermixture' can be seen to negate race, in a similar way to 'personality'.

Robert J. C. Young has pointed out that one of the five main positions held on miscegenation in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries was:

the idea that miscegenation produces a mongrel group that makes up a "raceless chaos", merely a corruption of the originals, degenerate and degraded, threatening to subvert the vigour and virtue of the pure races with which they come into contact [...].⁸

However, as Young points out, this 'raceless chaos' can be seen as subversive of racial theory, as 'these "raceless masses" which attain no new species through hybridization threaten to erase the discriminations of difference: the naming of human mixture as "degeneracy" both asserts the norm and subverts it, undoing its terms of distinction, and opening up the prospect of the evanescence of "race" as such.' Young sees this as the 'most anxious, vulnerable site' of racial theory in which, potentially, 'its dialectics of injustice, hatred and oppression can find themselves effaced and expunged.'⁹ This idea of a utopian space in which race is done away with is

⁸ Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 18.

⁹ Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 19.

evident in Lewis's praise for the 'chaotic spot' of 'intermixture': however, the creative negation of race by 'intermixture' differs fundamentally from the negation of race by 'personality' in that the former applies to a population, perhaps more precisely a 'crowd', whereas the latter is a more individual affair. In this distinction we can clearly see the outlines of one of Lewis's more straightforward racial/national prejudices: the belief that the English are more solitary, and therefore more independent and possessed of freedom, than either Jews or Mediterraneans. This prejudice can perhaps be best seen in the 1924 essay 'The Strange Actor' in which Lewis writes that 'English "independence," individualism, or whatever you like to call it, must be a thing very abhorrent to the Jew' as 'an almost morbid sociability, clinging gregariousness, and satisfaction in crowds, characterizes him'.¹⁰ In the case of Shakespeare, however, this prejudice would seem to cut both ways, as the individuality of his 'personality' is seen as a result of a perceived paucity of creativity in the England in which he lived, a situation Lewis described as 'his towering and hanging in the air, for no reason, where mostly everything is flat' (*LF*, 299).

It is also significant that Lewis sees 'intermixture' as 'incalculable' as well as 'chaotic', as this demonstrates for him that the problem of race as a ground for identity has an epistemological aspect as well as a cultural-political one: race might well be a deep cause of culture and cultural difference, but it is something 'incalculable' that is essentially beyond the scope of our knowledge. Lewis expresses this problem in terms of the rivalry between class and race as interpretive categories:

Sometimes the fashionable error of the moment is to neglect the factor of race, as though there were no such thing as race, but only classes or nations or empires; and sometimes it has been the fashion to exaggerate that factor, as though there were not such a thing as persons, but only races. Class in these adjustments is, of course, the great rival of race: it is also a very much easier thing to fix. Race is for

¹⁰ Wyndham Lewis, 'The Strange Actor', in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956*, ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989), p. 90.

the most part too obscure a force for us to be able to organize it into anything coherent, so it is perhaps rightly ignored. (*LF*, 295)

Lewis is here going against the mainstream of racial thought, as one of the main appeals of race seemed to have been its greater fixity as a category when contrasted to class in a society where class boundaries were rapidly changing. As Zygmunt Bauman has written, ‘the philosophical essence of racism’ is that ‘Man is before he *acts*; nothing he does may change what he is.’¹¹ In this view race is given an ontological primacy and stability that phenomena like class simply cannot have, and so it is assumed that knowledge based upon race is knowledge of this deeper ontological level, making it more real than knowledge based on less deep factors. In the passage above Lewis seems to be denying the claims of race as a deeper reality by positing it only as an alternative to class, and by apparently making the choice as to which of the two to use by reference to their epistemological efficacy: because race is ‘too obscure a force [...] it is perhaps rightly ignored.’ But the uncertainty signalled by that ‘perhaps’ is greatly amplified in the sentences that follow:

In an art-form like elizabethan drama, if the race factor could be got at, it might tell us a great deal more than anything else – as it goes deeper and farther back – about the impulses at work in it, giving it its particular physiognomy. But it is the only thing that is impossible to chart. We can only argue, rather uncertainly, from the results, and inductively work back to a supposed origin; where some particular idiosyncrasy, oddly flowering and challenging our curiosity, suggests a new road to the virgin regions behind us. (*LF*, 295)

There are two problems in these passages: the reality of race, and its epistemological accessibility. Lewis is not so much rejecting the reality of race, as I have argued he tends to do in the rest of the appendix, but claiming that the reality of race lies at such great a depth that it is not knowable to us. Like mainstream racism Lewis here does see race as an underlying reality that can explain cultural phenomena like drama better

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 60.

than class, but unlike most racists Lewis does not claim to have any knowledge of this racial reality, as for him it is a force that runs too deep to be known.

This positing of a reality that is so deep and unknowable that any claim to knowledge of it is unreal is a conceptual pattern that is not unique in Lewis's work; indeed, as shown in Chapter One, it is an idea that is central to his work. In *The Lion and the Fox* race takes the place of 'the Real', representing a reality that is both fundamental and unknowable. Lewis's assertion in *Time and Western Man* that 'we are surface creatures only' suggests that if race really does go 'deeper and farther back' than anything else then it will inevitably be 'impossible to chart'. Lewis's attitude to race here is also consistent with the idea that 'the Real' is opposed to and destructive of the personality: race is seen as opposed to personality which is said to be 'raceless for practical purposes'. The phrase 'for practical purposes' is reminiscent of other qualifications made by Lewis: for example, the idea in *The Art of Being Ruled* that 'Love, as we discursively understand it, can only exist on the surface' (ABR, 232), and the statement in 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' that 'to assume the dichotomy of mind and body is necessary here, without arguing it' ('Meaning', 157). In all these cases Lewis's qualifications indicate that his statements are not of ultimate truths or of 'the Real' but belong to a more superficial and human level; a level which is always vulnerable to intrusions from 'the Real' which it has to repress as a condition of its existence. In many ways Lewis's notion of the 'raceless' nature of personality and genius is similar to his assumption of 'the dichotomy of mind and body' as both seek to deny 'the unity of body and mind', the belief which Mosse sees as central to the historical development of racist thought. In the terms of Lewis's theory of the comic, race is a matter of 'things' rather than 'persons', which although it makes race a disagreeably reductive category for him nevertheless means that it is a very 'Real' one. In the essays 'Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change' (1926) Lewis is emphatic in his assertion that race does go 'deeper' than anything else:

the only true classes (and in consequence the only true wars, if you believe in the virtue of the crudest animal combat) are biologic in character, and not classes based on wealth [...]. All other conflicts are highly artificial, require a constant political or theologic manipulation and a whole gigantic sham structure of hypothesis and illusion to sustain them.¹²

The fact that all non-racial conflicts can only be sustained by ‘a whole gigantic sham structure’ demonstrated that such non-racial characteristics as personality and genius are in Lewis’s eyes matters of belief-sustained ‘reality’ rather than ‘the Real’. When read in the light of the ideas discussed in Chapter One, there is no contradiction between Lewis’s claims that race is unknowable and that it is the only truth. The disparity of tone of *The Lion and the Fox* and ‘Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change’ highlights the ambivalence of Lewis’s thinking on race and on biology in general: on the one hand he sees it as ‘the only true’ ground for identity, based as it is in ‘the Real’; but, precisely because of this basis, it is, to paraphrase *Time and Western Man*, to a truth from ‘beneath the surface’ which contradicts his values. Race may go ‘deeper and further back’ than any other factor, and so provide a solid ground for identity, but it cannot ground, indeed it actively undermines, the identity in which Lewis is primarily interested – that of the supposedly autonomous genius – and so he attempts to relegate it safely to the position of ‘the only thing that is impossible to chart’. As we will see, Lewis cannot get rid of race so easily, and even though it theoretically collapses in *The Lion and the Fox* it soon reassembles.

¹² Wyndham Lewis, ‘Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change’ in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change*, p. 144.

Paleface:

‘Race or Ideas?’

Many of the themes which are tentatively explored in the appendix to *The Lion and the Fox* form the main focus of Lewis’s 1929 book *Paleface: The Philosophy of the ‘Melting-Pot’*, in which, as is made clear by both the title and the original cover design,¹³ the political problems of the ‘colour line’ take centre stage. The introduction of the book seems to make clear Lewis’s main concern – the future of the white race and of European civilisation. Lewis writes that:

For what our white skin is worth, symbolically or otherwise, it is in America that its destinies are today most clearly foreshadowed: the essential universality of the problems provided for the Palefaces of America by the Indian factor in Latin America, by the Negro in North America and the West Indies, and by the proximity of Asia to the western shores of the United States, makes their attitudes in face of them of some moment to Europeans. And though there is no White Man’s Burden in Europe at present, the isolation of Europe is rather artificial; and so, politically, even, the questions lightly touched upon in this book are not insignificant. (*P*, v)

The language Lewis uses here – in particular his reference to the ‘White Man’s Burden’ – draws upon the discourse of colonialism, and the idea of the ‘destinies’ of ‘our white skin’ suggests that the model of race being used is a simple and familiar one. The anxiety expressed about the ‘problems’ of racial mixing, which is seen as happening already in America and inevitable in Europe, suggests that Lewis has a rather pessimistic, even apocalyptic vision of the ‘destinies’ of ‘our white skin’. This air of anxiety is noticeably lacking in the next sentence: ‘there is an inexhaustible fund of simple amusement in consciousness of pigment’ (*P*, v), a statement which seems at odds with the apocalyptic tone of the sentences preceding it. This disjuncture between the pessimistic and the playful runs throughout the

¹³ The original dust jacket is reproduced in Bradford Morrow & Bernard Lafourcade. *A Bibliography of the Writings of Wyndham Lewis*, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978).

book, which is almost impossible to summarise, containing as it does moments of unimaginative and depressing prejudice next to cutting criticisms of primitivism and some very interesting philosophical and political speculation. This heterogeneity of both style and content has meant that the book has been interpreted in different ways. Paul Edwards writes that '*Paleface* is in some aspects an excellent essay in cultural criticism,' that extends 'the critiques of *Time and Western Man*' to try and prove that:

The fantasy of a primitive authenticity in other races or cultures, romanticised as a transcendent force that might redeem the atomisation of urbanism and industrialism of white European decadence, is of a piece with other fantasies of hidden "natural" power [...]. As a fantasy of unconsciousness it is indeed, as Lewis claims, effectively an embrace of precisely the mechanisation that it believes itself to be rebelling against [...].¹⁴

In views such as those of Edwards, *Paleface* is primarily a critique of western attitudes towards different races rather than an attack on the values of those races. While there is a lot in *Paleface* that does do exactly that – for example, Lewis's extended dismissal of D. H. Lawrence – not all critics have been convinced by this sympathetic reading, Andrea Freud Loewenstein, for example, explicitly rejects the claims of Lewis as primarily an anti-primitivist, and writes of the book's 'blatant and virulent racism'.¹⁵ The awkward truth is that both accounts are correct: Lewis does attack fantasies of 'primitive authenticity in other races' but he also uses language which is, as we have seen in the passage quoted above, indebted to rather than critical of established racial thinking. To analyse and evaluate *Paleface* properly we should not try and decide which aspect of the book is the more prominent or representative but rather try and understand how an at times insightful critique of the construction of race

¹⁴ Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 382.

¹⁵ Andrea Freud Loewenstein, *Loathsome Jews and Engulfing Women: Metaphors of Projection in the Works of Wyndham Lewis, Charles Williams, and Graham Greene*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 1993), p. 151.

by western artists can be articulated alongside the apparently unreflective use of standard racial stereotypes. This mixed position, in which the conclusions of both the pro- and anti-Lewis camps are acknowledged, should not be seen as an indecisive compromise but as the only way of understanding the complexity and contrariness of the text.

Paleface is concerned with what Lewis sees as the clash between two opposed sets of forces which are familiar themes in his earlier cultural-critical writings: the rational and the irrational, the intellectual and the sensual, the male and the female, the stable and the fluid, space and time, the mind and the body. What substantially differentiates *Paleface* from *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man* is the inclusion of the non-European in the analysis: the criticism in the earlier books was aimed at forces clearly perceived as interior to the European world whereas *Paleface* takes America into account as well as looking specifically at the representation of non-Europeans – mainly African-Americans and Native Americans – in European culture. Lewis characterises the two sets of clashing forces as belonging to a ‘White’ and a ‘Dark’ demon, and writes that ‘Against this Dark Demon I oppose everywhere (for the sake of argument and “purely and simply to amuse myself”) a White Demon or *daimon*; the spirit of the White Race against the spirit of the Dark Race’, a statement that suggests Lewis had a very simple, black-and-white, racialised and racist view of the world. However, he immediately claims that it is ‘the “mystical” “dark” race of the romantic-White imagination’ to which he is opposed, and not ‘any flesh and blood Black brother, or fellow-slave, of the moment’ (*P*, 147). This move from embodied ‘race’ to imagined ‘ideas’ is typical of the book and suggests that ‘race’, in a standard biological sense of the word, is not, at least explicitly, Lewis’s main concern. However, he goes on to write that ‘With its White Demon I believe the White Race can be saved (instead of perishing on its way to the Melting-pot)’, which suggests that the motivating concern for Lewis is the survival of the ‘White Race’ as a race, and not, in his eyes at least, just a

product of ‘the romantic-White imagination’ (*P*, 148).¹⁶ Regardless of what it is that defines and grounds these two demons it is clear that Lewis sees their mixing as problematic for the ‘White Race’, writing of ‘the perils for our race (in its march towards the Melting-pot) of the “dark” familiars’ (*P*, 147). In this sentence we can see the characteristic tension between separation and aggregation of Lewis’s work: although he sees the ultimate aggregation of ‘Melting-pot’ as inevitable and not necessarily undesirable, he also expresses a desire to keep the ‘white’ and the ‘dark’ separate until that ultimate point is reached, a desire whose ultimate futility is recognised by Lewis.

Whether or not the ‘White demon’ and the ‘Dark demon’ should be seen in terms of embodied ‘race’ or imagined ‘ideas’ is a question that is explicitly discussed by Lewis, a fact that is overlooked by critics hostile to the book, and which would seem to problematise the notion that the book is simplistically and blatantly racist. I would argue that explicitly questioning the value of race as a means to categorise cultural forces is not a typical racist strategy, and is something which although it does not mitigate the offensive parts of the book does add to the book’s interest and significance, and demonstrates the complexity and self-conscious nature of Lewis’s thinking on race. Lewis realises that the issue of the existence of race itself is an issue that requires discussion and can not just be tacitly assumed:

There is a great deal of argument today as to whether the idea expressed in the proverb that “There are seeds in the body of the hare that are fatal to the body of the lion” is a true one or not. One set of disputants will tell you that “all people are the same” (in the face of much evidence to the contrary); and the other set will tell you that East is East and West is West, and that the *consciousness* of a race is deeply fixed, that it obstinately goes on its way, and when its consciousness is starved, inhibited or destroyed, it, too, the race,

¹⁶ Two years later in *Hitler* Lewis spells out what he saw as the political context for this ‘exoticism’ in a passage whose astute linkage of the colonial and the primitivist is perhaps unexpected in a book which endorses German National Socialism and its race theory: ‘What after all is the Exoticist but the White Conqueror turned literary and sentimental? [...] Mr D. H. Lawrence, five hundred years ago, would have been a Cortes – or nothing’ (*H*, 117-18).

ceases to exist. Perhaps the truth is not quite on the side of either of these disputants, but somewhere else and not to be answered by such a simple statement. (*P*, 155)

This statement presents what Goldberg calls the ‘two general forms’ of twentieth century thinking on race, and it is significant that Lewis does not decide in favour of either side but suggests the need for another way of looking at the issue: that he does not find such another way, but remains trapped in the either/or situation he described was unfortunate. Despite this, however, he starts the next paragraph by stating that ‘there are many facts that suggest that a race *has* a soul (or “consciousness,” or whatever you like to call it): that it is vulnerable and of vital importance to the race’ (*P*, 155). The evidence that Lewis gives to support this claim comes in the form of quotations from the section *The Art of Being Ruled* that deals with homosexuality, an association that is in itself significant, for it links the decline of the soul of a race with a decline in male heterosexuality and the failure to maintain gender boundaries, a linkage which Lewis does not emphasise as much in *Paleface* as he does in *The Art of Being Ruled*. In *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis discusses anthropological accounts of homosexuality in the Chukchee people of Siberia, emphasising the elasticity of their sexuality and the way which ‘the males [relapse] into what in Sodom are technically called “bitches,” in a process of almost physiological transformation’ (*P*, 156). In *Paleface* he is more interested in the way in which the ‘soul’ of the Chukchee collapsed on contact with other races, writing that:

The Chukchee . . . in spite of their hardiness, are, however, subject to annihilating collapses of vitality of which the phenomenon of “arctic hysteria” is a celebrated symptom. But another symptom is equally striking. Prolonged slumber, lasting many weeks, is common with them – a suddenly recurring hibernation or estivation. A man will collapse, feeling unwell, and go to bed and sleep, and so remain until he either dies or recovers. So the rigour of the climate, claiming of them unnatural hardihood and powers of resistance, overwhelms them in this way once it passes their guard. After the subjection of neighbouring tribes by the Cossacks some fifty years ago, it is said that the whole population suddenly collapsed: they lost all interest

and zest in life, neglected their usual occupations, sank into a listless poverty, and became almost a burden and a menace to their conquerors. (*P*, 156)

In *The Art of Being Ruled* Lewis adds that:

These facts are interesting as showing the precarious nature of this sublime hardiness and male virtue that we associate with many northern races: how, a spring of activity and the sense of freedom once touched roughly, the whole structure of what we connect with manhood can crash, in the way the personality of a shell-shocked man disintegrates in a moment. (*ABR*, 260)

It is interesting that Lewis presents the 'collapse' of the Chukchee as being a gender problem in *The Art of Being Ruled* but as a race problem in *Paleface*, not only because it clearly demonstrates the connection between the two phenomena in his thought but also because it suggests that Lewis does not see the racial characteristic of the Chukchee, about which he is largely positive, as something natural but, like masculinity, as something artificial and precarious. Rather than being a natural deep cause the racial characteristics of the Chukchee are superficial and unnatural – he writes of their 'unnatural hardihood and powers of resistance' – and their 'collapse', whether caused by external forces, as in the case of Cossack invasion, or internal forces, the spontaneous 'Prolonged slumber' Lewis writes of, is represented as a fall back into nature from their previous unnatural position. It would appear that the racial characteristics of the Chukchee are opposed to nature rather than in harmony with it, an idea that sits well with Lewis's general antipathy towards the biological as a ground for identity.

So having established, to his satisfaction at least, the reality of racial decline Lewis goes on to enquire as to the grounds for the difference in races that he sees as causing that decline. In the chapter 'Race or Ideas?' Lewis addresses the question of whether cultural differences, which he takes as a given, necessarily have a corporeal ground:

Is it necessary for this different “consciousness,” between which and ours “there is no bridge, no canal or connection,” this *soul*, to be incarnated in a Mexican Indian (or a Hindu, a Polynesian or a Bantus, to choose Mr. Lawrence’s other examples)? Or can this be merely a disincarnate idea? Is the scientist or mathematical man of genius as good for those destructive purposes as the Toltec or Hopi? Or must it be a *race*? (*P*, 170)

The initial answer to the questions is given in terms of the opposition he sees between the belated romanticism of D. H. Lawrence and his own more abstract and intellectual outlook. He writes that:

The romantic side in Mr. Lawrence, his love of the sensationally concrete, would always dispose him to seek this situation in the physiological clash of races, as others can see it only in classes. He sees it as a *race* situation and also quite conventionally, as a conventional and wholly melodramatic race situation. (*P*, 170)

Lewis associates Lawrence’s outlook with Kipling’s, adding that, for Lawrence ‘East is East, and West is West, and the unbridgeable *something* – the alien and unassimilable seed in the matrix of the Indian “consciousness,” will not accommodate itself to the White’ (*P*, 170). Against what he sees as the romantic, physical, and possibly colonialist mentality of Lawrence Lewis sets what he calls his ‘more abstract interests’, which, he argues, lead him to ‘seek it rather in *ideas* than in *races*’ (*P*, 170), the ‘it’ here being the ground of cultural difference. This sort of simple and dualistic opposition between the disembodied intellectual classicist and the sensational physical romantic is common in Lewis’s writing, and, as we have already seen in Chapter Two, is equally commonly followed by a series of qualifications which complicate and render more interesting what would seem at first a rather rigid and unimaginative dualism. In ‘Race or Ideas?’ Lewis does exactly that, adding that:

the culture of one race, acquiring a political mastery over another, and imposing its ideas upon it, is able and very likely to destroy the soul and so the physical life of another race. There are too many

events that testify to it in recent history for that not to be beyond possibility of question. But an *idea* is quite as powerful. Even a race, for that matter, can annihilate another race with a swarm of ideas, or intellectualized notions; ideas proper to itself but with properties of disintegration for another race; or with ideas not necessarily its own, but such as it could manipulate without injury to itself, and which are destructive to its adversary. (*P*, 171)

Here the hitherto opposed notions of 'ideas' and 'races' are confused and conflated, with Lewis casting ideas as being 'quite as powerful' as races, and writing of them as being able to be used as weapons by races against other races, a situation which necessarily implies the existence of races. This confusion of race and ideas is also a confusion of the physical and the intellectual, with Lewis describing the effects of ideas in terms more conventionally used for physical phenomena: ideas come in 'swarms', 'annihilate' races, and are capable of causing 'injury' and 'disintegration'. Lewis seems to be aware that he is confusing what he had previously opposed, writing that 'If we *were* in touch with an alien "consciousness" [...] we should find that "consciousness," no doubt, inimical, confusing and dangerous to our vital impulses, as Mr. Lawrence describes' (*P*, 171-2).

Lewis's admission that the descriptions of the romantic and physically minded Lawrence are applicable and that 'our vital impulses' are endangered in the event of contact (interestingly, the phrase 'in touch with', with its distinctly physical connotations, is used) with an alien 'consciousness', seems to suggest that he does not see the separation between race and ideas, between the corporeal and the disincarnate, as being one that is absolutely watertight. Just as with his mind-body dualism discussed in Chapter Two, clear-cut distinctions are always haunted by the possibility of indistinctness. This impression is given further weight when he writes that:

Whites certainly are finding the attack of alien ideas confusing and dangerous for their Will and Imagination, just as much as though they were clearly, sharply and picturesquely incarnated in some alien people, with who we came in daily contact, and who had tested us politically. (*P*, 172)

Lewis argues that although it is disincarnate ideas and not corporeal race that is the ground of cultural difference it is as though it were race: whatever deep cause is chosen the surface phenomena appear the same, and so racially based language can be used effectively to describe them. Indeed, the apparent identity of 'alien ideas' and 'alien people' is stressed, with Lewis concluding that: 'the racial analogy will serve. But you must fix your eye on something less palpable – on systems of ideas, and a restless mass of theories' (*P*, 172). Although Lewis consistently argues against the idea that cultural difference is grounded in corporeal difference he is unable to discard it entirely, and ends up using the corporeal rhetoric of race to describe phenomena which he sees as fundamentally non-racial and disincarnate.

This confused approach to race and ideas is given one last, highly peculiar, imaginative flourish by Lewis, in an extended metaphor which mixes together not only the physical and the intellectual, but also the ancient, the non-European, the archaeologist, death, history, refuse, infection, and modernist literary practice. He writes that:

We are almost reminded of the superstitions associated with the tombs of the Egyptian dead, and the belief in the unlucky nature of the enterprise of the excavator: the late Lord Carnavon and Tutankamen, for instance. His death seemed to come very suddenly after disturbing Tutankamen. – The White Man has unearthed and brought to light an enormous historical rubbish-heap: there is nothing he has not excavated and brought into his own "consciousness" for examination. Some of the distant charms and remote systems have released into his "stream of consciousness" things that are not healthy for it, perhaps? (*P*, 172)

Here the 'stream of consciousness' is seen as a blood-stream, and so as susceptible to infection in a quasi-physical way. This becoming physical of the mental is complemented by the mummified corpse of Tutankamen becoming abstracted into a 'historical rubbish-heap': just as the mind can be affected physically, the dead body can produce intellectual decay. It no longer matters whether disembodied ideas or corporeal race is at the root

of the disintegration of the consciousness of the 'White Man' as the two initially opposed concepts have become effectively interchangeable and interdependent: the 'White Race' is meaningful only because of the 'White Demon', the 'Dark Races' only because of the 'Dark Demon' (itself a product of the 'White Race'). Although he does not say so himself, it seems that Lewis's racial terms, like the terms 'classic' and 'romantic' in *Men Without Art*, are, when looked at closely, 'strictly unusable'.

In *The Lion and the Fox*, Lewis discusses race primarily as an interpretative category, rather than as a historical phenomenon, and associates its use as such with the 'depersonalisation' that he saw as symptomatic of modernity. Three years later, in *Paleface*, the concept of race seemed to have become more of a pressing issue for Lewis: rather than being apologetically discussed in an appendix, race took central stage and provided the unifying theme for a whole book. Even so, we can still see considerable doubt about the physical reality of racial difference, particularly in the 'Race or Ideas?' chapter, in which the split between Lewis's racial theory and rhetoric is clearly demonstrated. Race is in *Paleface* still viewed as essentially a negative phenomenon, the antithesis of the individual, independent and disembodied intellect that Lewis advocated, and despite some serious qualifications the negative values of race are primarily associated with non-white people and the positive values of non-race with whites. This splitting of values along a 'colour line' is partly due to the critical nature of the book, for in part it is the attribution of the characteristics of race – instinct, collective existence, unconscious creativity – to non-whites by whites, and artists in particular, that Lewis is criticising, and so it can be argued that Lewis is being negative not about non-whites as such, but about the stereotype created of them by some whites. However, this splitting is also perpetuated by the book itself, as is shown in the introduction and the chapters on miscegenation, which both show a clear and untheorised preference for the white over the non-white. There may be no theoretical basis for racism expressed in *Paleface*, indeed theoretically the book is, if anything, anti-racist in many ways, but rhetorically there is a great deal of racist

expression: the ideas themselves may be innocuous enough, but the way they are presented clearly demonstrates that the racist rhetoric of the white world being swamped by the non-white is at work.

The true meaning of *Paleface* can not be solely attributed to either of these two competing aspects of the book – non-racist theory or racist rhetoric – but is found in their uneasy coexistence, which demonstrates not only Lewis's personal ambivalence about race but also the epistemic shift which the concept and theory of race was undergoing in the inter-war period. Whereas in the nineteenth century the theory and rhetoric of racism were more-or-less still unified and interdependent on each other, by the 1920s and 30s each had achieved a degree of autonomy which meant that racist expressions could be used without the racial discourse that had formed their theoretical basis still being believed in. Thus it is that in *Paleface* that Lewis is able to argue against the concept of race while still using racist expression for which that concept would appear to be a logical necessity.

Hitler:

'The Instinct of the Blood'

If in *Paleface* race was still viewed as an essentially negative and non-white phenomenon and its reality was still in question, in *Hitler* (1931) it seems to have been uncritically accepted, given a positive meaning, even in its most collective and 'mindless' aspects, and attributed to whites, that 'race' whose genius had previously been seen precisely in its capacity to allow the emergence of individuals who could negate their racial backgrounds and achieve some sort of universal 'genius' or 'personality'. If we are to understand Lewis's attraction to and endorsement of German National Socialism within the perspective of his career as a whole, it is this severe conceptual change on his part that needs most explanation, rather than his sympathy with an aesthetic of order, his attraction to a strong leader figure, or even his desire for an alternative to capitalism and communism, all of which, while important factors, remain rather straightforward explanations and do not register the abrupt philosophical change that Lewis underwent. Lewis's support for a doctrine which had the notion of a collective consciousness embodied in race as one of its theoretical cornerstones must seem strange if viewed in the light of his previous thoughts on this subject, but however illogical it might seem it remains a historical reality, and one which must be explained.

Nazi race-theory is not just quietly accepted in *Hitler* but actively discussed: one of the six sections of the book is titled "Race" and "Class", and another "All That is Not Race in This World is Dross", the latter of which deals exclusively with race theory.

Lewis begins "All That is Not Race in This World is Dross" by suggesting 'that you earnestly grapple with the nationalsocialist doctrine of *Blutsgefühl* [blood-feeling]' because 'the whole bag of tricks of nationalsocialist theory is contained in that bloody portmanteau-word' (*H*, 103). We can see here that Lewis sees blood-feeling as central to National Socialist doctrine and not just some incidental and exotic addition, indeed

he writes that 'Nationalsocialism is founded upon the "Blood-feeling"' (H, 105). Lewis quotes a passage from the *Nationalsozialistische Briefe* (November 15, 1930) in which the writer, in Lewis's translation, declares that:

Nationalsocialism teaches the Age of Blood. Out of the blood-feeling a new will to Nationalism and to Socialism shall be born. Out of the conscious blood feeling.

The Middle-ages also lived upon the basis of a blood-connection between the individual members of the race. Only then the blood-connection was not conscious. The Ethic of the Middle-ages was christian. The Blood-metaphysic was suppressed because of the monkish asceticism, which always operated in a *Blood-denying* sense, since theirs was a world established only upon mind. The body was felt to be a hindrance and denied – attention to the Blood-peculiarity stamped out as a sin of the flesh.

In spite of all these measures against the Blood-instinct, it is still alive today. Nationalsocialism builds upon this Blood-feeling. (H, 105)

In this passage (which is representative of much of contemporary Nazi race thinking) we can see the positive valorisation of several things that Lewis had previously denigrated – nationalism, socialism, race, the body, instinct – but which he here endorses, writing that:

The Instinct of the Blood – the bodily pose, colour, shape and smell – that is to be the bond – but a bond based upon similarity, not upon difference. That profound race-sympathy is to be encouraged at all costs: likewise the first instinctive revulsion to all that is strange, and belonging to a distinct and alien culture, must not be suppressed, it must be enthusiastically admitted to our consciousness and entertained. (H, 105-6)

In *Paleface* Lewis had written derisively of 'The consciousness in the abdomen', which, in his view, 'removes the vital centre into the viscera, and takes the privilege of leadership away from the hated "mind" or "intellect," established up above in the head' (P, 177). If we look back to the passage from the *Nationalsozialistische Briefe* we can see the praise of a consciousness which, grounded as it is in the body and not the mind,

seems remarkably similar to the visceral ‘conscious in the abdomen’ that was condemned in *Paleface* as a romantic and anti-authoritarian sentimentality. Rather than evading this comparison in *Hitler* Lewis actually introduced it, writing that the Nazi blood-feeling was the same as what ‘Walt Whitman termed “the talk of the turning eyeballs”’ (*H*, 106). Having made the comparison between Nazi blood-feeling and Walt Whitman – ‘with his cosmic enthusiasms, his bursting and blatant romanticism, his lyrical cult of a universal brotherhood’ – Lewis tried to deny its validity, writing that:

whereas Walt Whitman [...] sought to enlist this sort of fleshy second-sight in the service of *diffusion*, the present-day *Blutsgefühl* doctrinaires invoke it on behalf of a greater *concentration*. For the american Nineteenth Century prophet would have it employed to decipher “the talk of the turning eyeballs” in the heads of *whatever* man they revolved (provided he “went upright” and was certified a “human being”). But these newer germanic blood-mystics invoke the human body to an end *opposite to that* of the great revolutionary sentimentalist and romantic [...]. (*H*, 106)

What ‘these newer germanic blood-mystics’ desired was, Lewis wrote:

a *closer and closer* drawing together of the people of one race and culture, by means of bodily attraction. It must be a true bodily solidarity. Identical rhythms in the arteries and muscles, and in the effective neutral instrument – that should provide us with a passionate *exclusiveness*, with a homogenous social framework, within the brotherly bounds of which we could all live secure from alien interference, and so proceed with our work and with our pleasures, whatever they may be. (*H*, 106-7)

This stressing of the importance of ‘bodily attraction’, ‘bodily solidarity’, and ‘Identical rhythms in the arteries and muscles’ in National Socialism suggests the merging of the individual members of a race into one giant entity, an image that Lewis had in fact used earlier in the book when describing Nazi rallies, in which he wrote that ‘there was something like

the physical pressure of one immense, indignant thought' (*H*, 10-11).¹⁷ This taking over of individual bodies by an external consciousness and will was something that Lewis had previously been highly critical of, associating it with mass life in both its capitalist and communist forms. As David Ayers writes, 'It seems at first strange that Lewis, who praised personality and separation from the masses, should now come to praise a collectivism which makes each individual the bodily part of one single individual'.¹⁸ What makes it more strange is that the language he used to describe Nazi crowds is remarkably similar to that which he attacked in *Paleface*: for example, he quoted the following passage from Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, describing what Lewis calls 'the peculiar solidarity of [...] negro workers':

The bodies of all the men running up and down the landing-stage were one body. One could not be distinguished from another. They were lost in each other. Could the bodies of people be so lost in each other? (quoted in *P*, 221)

Lewis replies to this rhetorical question thus:

The answer of course to that last question [...] is "Yes they can. It is quite easy for White Men, as well as Negroes, to become *Mass men*, 'not to be distinguished from one another.' Intensive Industrialism is able to achieve that for you whoever the bosses." But Intensive Industrialism is what Mr. Anderson never ceases to fulminate against. And his reasons for hating it appear to be precisely that it *does* merge people in the way that he exultantly describes the Negro workers as being merged, in one featureless anonymous black organism, like a gigantic centipede. So in the same breath he is gloomy and joyful over the same phenomenon! The black skin appears to have the power of disguising the reality from him. (*P*, 221-2)

This image of the (racialised) crowd as organism is an image that he had already developed in his work, and which in *Hitler* has had its valorisation

¹⁷ In *The Hitler Cult* Lewis would describe the same crowd as a 'mastodon [...] the New Proletariat in its first months of epileptic life' (*HC*, 5).

¹⁸ David Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man*, (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 197.

and context changed. In *Hitler* Lewis seems to be 'joyful' about what in *Paleface* he had been 'gloomy': in his case, though, it was the white skin and the threat he imagined it to be under which had 'the power of disguising the reality from him.' In the case of Anderson he writes that a 'subsidiary confusion is caused [...] by the fact that the mechanical Negroes are given as a characteristic feature of the free natural life of the Mississippi before the arrival of Industrialism' (*P*, 222). The same basic confusion is also present in *Hitler*, in which Lewis writes of Hitler himself as a 'peasant' and of Nazism as 'the militancy of an armed peasant' (*H*, 32, 45) and presents both as expressions of a natural and pre-modern simplicity, writing that:

you get in [Hitler], cut out in the massive and simple lines of a peasant art, the core of the teutonic character. And his "doctrine" is essentially just a set of rather primitive laws, promulgated in the interest of that particular stock or type, in order to satisfy its especial requirements and ambitions, and to ensure its vigorous survival, intact and true to its racial traditions. (*H*, 31-2)

This identification of Nazism with some sort of pre-modern peasant authenticity fails to register its highly modern character and the fact that it was only made possible through the resources, intellectual and technological, of modernity: just as Anderson wrongly saw the 'the mechanical Negroes' as symbolic of the pre-industrial, Lewis wrongly sees the very modern phenomenon of Nazism as a continuation of some mythical pre-modern ideals.¹⁹

So Lewis's support for Nazism in *Hitler* uses images similar to ones that he has previously criticised and is subject to precisely the criticisms he had made of the 'romantic' Sherwood Anderson, but, despite his

¹⁹ Zygmunt Bauman has described the relationship of racism to modernity in terms that are very useful, writing that: 'Modernity made racism possible. It also created a demand for racism; an era that declared achievement to be the only measure of human worth needed a theory of ascription to redeem boundary-drawing and boundary-guarding concerns under new conditions which made boundary-crossing easier than ever before. Racism, in short, is a thoroughly modern weapon used in the conduct of pre-modern, or at least not exclusively modern, struggles.' *Modernity and the Holocaust*, pp. 61-2.

recognition of the similarity between Nazism and the romanticism of Whitman, he maintains that there is an essential difference between the two movements because the one concentrates, the other diffuses. But what exactly is it that is being concentrated? The two most likely possibilities would seem to be either Western civilization or the white race, but Lewis seems to deny these possibilities. Lewis writes that 'romantic cosmos-fans', such as Whitman, William Blake, and D. H. Lawrence 'prepared the way for the disintegration of our Western society' and that 'That society was a poor thing, but our own, and we surely would have improved it, if we had only known how to keep it intact' (*H*, 107, 108). The use of the past tense here suggests that Lewis sees 'Western society' as already disintegrated, which would make any attempt to prevent that disintegration a futile and belated one. Indeed, it is part of Lewis's tragic world-view that modernity has irreparably changed the world and that, as desirable as it may be, there is no going back.

So if it is not 'Western society' that he wishes to preserve and concentrate perhaps it is Western man in a racial sense. This idea is partly discredited, with Lewis writing that "'Aryan" is a useful word – it conveys something that is well-defined enough, for me at all events, but is ethnologically indefensible, I daresay. And I do not pretend myself to regard many of their dogmas in detail as acceptable' (*H*, 108). If it was the 'Aryan', or some vision of Western man analogous to it, that Lewis sought to preserve and concentrate he was in the strange position of defending an ethnicity that he claimed was 'ethnologically indefensible', as well as trying to halt the disintegration of an already disintegrated society. Despite his reservations about both Western society and Western man it is exactly these things that he is trying to preserve and concentrate, as he makes quite clear a little later:

So by *developing* (rather than *relaxing*, as happens in the Cosmopolitan West) the love and understanding of blood-brothers, of one culture, children of the same tradition, whose deepest social interest, when all is said and done, are one: that is the only sane and realistic policy in the midst of a disintegrating world. (*H*, 109)

Here the notion of 'blood-brothers' seems to replace the notion of the Aryan, although what is the difference between them is never explained and would appear to be entirely negligible, and what was previously disintegrated is now disintegrating, leaving the previously foreclosed possibility of regeneration open. Lewis's statement that the Aryan was 'ethnologically indefensible', made only a page before, seems forgotten and an entirely uncritical notion of some sort of Western civilised spirit embodied in the blood seems to have been adopted in spite of it. This idea of a new racial consciousness for white Europeans had already been aired in *Paleface*, where Lewis wrote that:

I really believe that we could, if we wanted to, get up quite a fellow-feeling for our fellow Palefaces. What I fear is that as things stand at present it would immediately result in our looking askance at our Black and Yellow brothers: for everybody has been so long indoctrinated with intolerant attitudes of mind, that dogmatical mechanical reversals have become the only way that the average Paleface is now able to express himself at all. (*P*, 20)²⁰

With the publication of *Hitler* and Lewis's accommodation and endorsement of the 'ethnologically indefensible' concept of the Aryan it seems that Lewis himself had been subject to just such a 'dogmatical mechanical reversal'. The fact that Lewis had accurately described a process which he would undergo two years later should not be seen to mitigate his support for Nazism, but the way in which the earlier text seems to anticipate, at least on a conceptual level, his later political development is significant, for it suggests that there is a continuity between the texts on the level of conceptual patterns if not on the level of

²⁰ Lewis goes on to write that: 'As far as I am concerned I would rather have things as they are than provoke in any way a reactions of intolerance. But there is no fear of that for the moment: and when the reactions comes, as it must, I hope that what I shall have had to say will serve to make its manifestations less ridiculous, and to offer some resistance to the colour-blind fanatic who can only see one colour at a time, as it were, and not simultaneously embrace a walnut brown and an ivory white, as we should be able to do with ease and conviction' (*P*, 21). As in *The Hitler Cult* ten years later, Lewis seems keen to reserve his own personal right to miscegenation.

values. It is as if Lewis had mapped out a series of possible positions which remained present throughout his career but that which of those positions was seen as favourable and which as not changed, as we can see in the changing fortunes of the ideas of a bodily based consciousness or of the crowd functioning as a single organism.

There is in these passages a strong sense of double-think: Lewis is defending the indefensible, falling back on concepts that he has previously attacked, and resorting to empty assertions like 'it conveys something that is well-defined enough' which unsuccessfully tries to hide the fact that the 'something' that is conveyed is a 'something' that he finds 'indefensible'. Indeed, later on in the text, Lewis writes that:

under the compulsion of emergency conditions, values change, and we are forced to admit arguments which, in other circumstances, we might regard as unsound. In brief, we are compelled, I think, to lay more stress upon what is pragmatism and *useful*, and less upon what is perhaps eternally true. It is a case of *force majeure*. I surrender, therefore, to the argument of the Fox and the Goose, the Cat and the Mouse. – We are in the greatest danger. Gentleness, beauty, sweet reason must veil their heads, they must give way to arguments of *power*. (*H*, 129-30)²¹

The admission that his acceptance of Nazi race theory is a matter of pragmatism and surrender rather than one of eternal truth, and the comment that these are arguments 'which, in other circumstances, we might regard as unsound' hardly forms a ringing endorsement of the Nazi position and would seem to serve badly as propaganda.

²¹ In *Men Without Art* Lewis uses a similar justification and the same terminology to argue that all politics are useless: 'But this is not a question of right and wrong, but of *force majeure*. That is why it is a pure waste of time to discuss solemnly the rights and wrongs of the matter. Nature (aided by science) is *too* bountiful: but the human power-complex (aided by science) is *too* powerful! So there you are. Most economists talk as if it were a purely mechanical problem with which they were confronted – as if, in fact, it were always the same dear old Nature that was in front of them. But of course it is just the opposite. It is nature all right – but it is *human* nature this time. And it is because it is a purely human problem that it is so hopeless. It is best therefore never to discuss these matters [i.e. party politics and economic reform]' (*MWA*, 199).

In his book *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man* (1992) David Ayers sees Lewis's turn to race in *Hitler* as a reaction to his failure to find a stable ground for individual identity in the self:

Where the concept of the self will not suffice to guarantee the existence of the individual, the concept of the European must step into the breach. Lewis advocates no justification for the concept. Although "blood" is the basis of race, Lewis is careful, [in *Paleface*] as in *Hitler*, to set it between inverted commas, deleted at the moment of utterance and thereby rendered irrelevant to the concept of race, a concept which, in its turn, is unthinkable without "blood". It is in the nature of Lewis' metaphysic to demand definition and delineation yet to undermine whatever distinction is drawn as arbitrary, fundamentally illusory.²²

Ayers portrays Lewis as a proto-Derridean racist who places race under erasure to maintain a politically correct facade, and does not consider the possibility that he may have had serious doubts about the concept of race. Lewis does not just 'advocate no justification for the concept' of race, he argues against it in *The Lion and the Fox* and *Paleface*, and displays uneasiness about it in *Hitler* even as he endorses it. Of course, this inconsistency does not redeem Lewis politically but merely indicates that his attitude to race is not as simple as Ayers suggests. Ayers' insight into what he calls Lewis's 'metaphysic' is instructive, but he does not fully explore its implications for Lewis's 'hypothetical premises about human kinds', to use Goldberg's phrase.²³ In particular, Ayers does not look at the question of Lewis's attitude to biological determinism: his assertion that the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg's statement that "the permanent lie is the 'organic truth' of the Jewish counter-race" [...] is a statement not far from Lewis' own' does not take into account the question of whether Lewis saw 'organic truth' in any race.²⁴

Lewis claims in *Hitler* that his support of Nazism is a political choice based on expediency rather than a philosophical choice based on truth. He

²² Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man*, pp. 193-94.

²³ Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, p. 47.

²⁴ Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man*, p. 31.

claims that he has been forced to make such a choice because of ‘emergency’ conditions, with the strong implication that if it were not for those, he would not endorse Nazism and in particular its race theory. Lewis writes that:

Really, the point is, I think, that we “Aryans,” or whatever we are, are faced with extinction. We cannot afford just now to be philosophers, nor yet humanitarians. No one will be philosophical, nor yet humanitarian, with *us*. Yes, the above argument of Hitler’s is an argument for *an emergency*. Everything now almost, since the War, seems a matter of life and death. It is not an argument for the scientific mind, but for the political mind. (*H*, 127-8)

Lewis’s position could perhaps be described, using the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, as ‘a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.’²⁵ However, although Lewis’s politics are not disavowed they are not exactly ‘scrupulously visible’ either: he feels that ‘we’ are faced with extinction, although he cannot explain exactly who this ‘we’ is or what or who it is that poses the threat. His use of the word ‘Aryans’ in inverted commas and its qualification by the phrase ‘or whatever we are’, does not testify to any deep commitment to the concept of the Aryan race, but rather suggests that he is using this word because he cannot think of any others that will do.

The ‘argument of the Fox and the Goose’ Lewis refers to above, is his term for the arguments against miscegenation that formed an important part of Nazi race theory. Lewis paraphrases a passage from *Mein Kampf* in which, according to Lewis, Hitler ‘directs your attention to the particular pragmatical truth’ of ‘the exclusiveness of Nature, in respect of the various life-forms to be found in the animal creation.’ Lewis cites the assertion that ‘Nature registers her protest’ against miscegenation by either making its issue infertile or by ‘robbing them’ of resistance ‘against sickness or enemy attack’ (*H*, 125). Lewis’s endorsement of such an argument here would

²⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography’, first published 1985, in *The Spivak Reader*, eds. Donna Landry & Gerald MacLean, (New York & London: Routledge, 1996), p. 214.

seem to entail a reversal of his earlier view in *The Lion and The Fox* that 'the incalculable factor of racial intermixture' was central to 'Any analysis of a great creative period' (*LF*, 298). Lewis goes on to write that

this reasoning is intended to conduct us, it is obvious, is to a sense of the danger inherent in the drying-up or the blunting of our primitive instincts, which permits us to mate with people of an inferior race. (Racial "inferiority" and "superiority" is taken for granted almost. In any case, "I am superior to you" is the instinctive attitude of any living organism.) Such a "bastardization" is race-suicide (for Nature will rapidly revenge herself upon us) – even though it may be certainly, in some cases, for the individual, something like the enjoyment of a maggoty cheese – much better fun than homely Cheddar! And this is not a moral consideration at all: it is a purely practical one. Race-loyalty is one of the elementary conditions of self-security and of self-survival. (*H*, 125-6)

This is all fairly standard racist doctrine, although the reference to 'the enjoyment of a maggoty cheese' perhaps goes further in its admission of 'illicit' desires than mainstream Nazi propaganda. Race and race-survival are seen as natural and primitive instincts which do not need any additional justification, and as is indicated by the last paragraph, this notion of racial survival has a parallel in the survival of the self. David Ayers has suggested that Lewis's turn to Nazism occurred because Lewis came to see the preservation of the race as the only practical means of preserving the individual self.

However, there is another instance, apart from the 'maggoty cheese', where the assumption of racial superiority becomes a little problematic, namely the assertion that it 'is the instinctive attitude of any living organism.' This statement seems to universalise the sense of superiority – 'any living organism', not even any human – and to subjectivise it as well – superiority is seen as the 'attitude' of an organism towards itself and others, rather than as an objective biological fact. This subjectivisation of the sense of racial superiority involves a relativisation of racial hierarchy as well, in which racial values depend upon the position of the evaluating subject rather than an objective natural order. In Lewis's view it appears that all organisms have a subjective feeling of superiority, not only

‘objectively’ superior ones, an opinion that would seem at odds with Nazi ideology, which saw only one point of view – that of the Aryan race – as valid and as such overriding of all others. Lewis’s relation of natural hierarchy to subjective view point is apparent in the following passage, which takes the animal analogies used by Hitler and treats them with something less than seriousness:

Why the donkey may not with impunity mate with the horse, is because the latter is the nobler animal, apparently.

There is a difficulty here: for we are inclined to ask whether there is anything ultimately more desirable in being a horse rather than in being a donkey. On the face of it, a racehorse would be a jollier thing to be, it is true, than any moke that ever brayed. If it really came to the point, most of us given the choice would find ourselves in a racing-stable rather than chewing a turnip. Yet there is always something to be said for the donkey. It might even be the philosopher’s choice. But it would never be the man-of-action’s. (*H*, 127)

Given that Lewis saw himself more as a philosopher than as a man of action, he seems here to be identifying to some extent with the donkey, the animal that is generally assumed to be inferior. I am not suggesting that this redeems the book *Hitler* from its support of Nazism but merely pointing out that Lewis’s attitudes toward race as articulated in his first and most famous ‘fascist’ text are hardly identical with a self-confident or self-serving racism, but instead are self-conscious and ambiguous. That ambiguity and self-consciousness should enter the text at the point when race, and specifically racial superiority, is being discussed is significant for it suggests that this is a point where Lewis cannot accept wholeheartedly the Nazism he is in the process of supporting. I would argue Lewis’s identification with the donkey quoted above indicates that he did not share the self-confident sense of biological superiority that was fundamental to the Nazi project. Nazi racial ideology involved the assumption of a distinction between the fully human and the sub-human, and while Lewis’s work, both fictional and theoretical, attests to his fascination with the boundary between the human and the non- or sub-human he did not seem

able to place himself so automatically as could the Nazis on the side of the unequivocally human. Lewis was undeniably attracted to Nazi race theory and to the corporeal ground for politics it offered; however, despite his rhetorical endorsement of it, he did not find that ground to be as stable as it appeared.

The Hitler Cult:

‘Such a boomerang is a race theory’

One of the best places to go for criticism of Lewis’s endorsement of Nazi race theory is his own 1939 book *The Hitler Cult*, in which he put forward arguments against both Hitler, now seen as a ‘Jingo God’, and Nazism, ‘the philosophical stuffing of the Jingo God’ (*HC*, x). In this later book Lewis quotes the passage from *Mein Kampf* on miscegenation which he had approvingly paraphrased in *Hitler* (see above and *H*, 125-6) and argues against it, as, he claims, his pride is ‘slightly ruffled by the above zoological catalogue’. Lewis writes that:

in reading the above passage I find that I object to the suggestion that my freedom of action should be curtailed, as if I were a finch or a wolf, creatures of so much more limited aptitude than myself.

If I wanted to, I should certainly cohabit with a Negress, or wed (if I were not already married) Anna May Wong, if that beautiful Chinese and myself were of a mind to become man and wife. As to a Jewess, that is not an ethnological term, but belongs to a widely distributed and extremely mixed community. (*HC*, 67-8)

Lewis objects to the metaphorical treatment of humans as if they were animals, a perennial concern and interest of his, as here he sees it as threatening his own status as human, and to the curtailment of his own personal freedom to indulge in miscegenation. It seems that he has returned to his earlier position of seeing biological categories as essentially restrictive and opposed to the freedom of the ‘personality’. However, his statement that ‘Jewess [...] is not an ethnological term’ suggests that he thinks that ‘Negress’ and ‘Chinese’ are, a suggestion supported by his later claim that

a “colour-bar,” not only social, but also biological, does exist; and is quite sufficiently effective to prevent any really unsuitable cross-breeding. It is certainly powerful enough to discourage the magnificent Nordic Aryans of New York City from inter-marrying with the Negro to any great extent: or to put it in another way (and one of a type less familiar to the mind of Herr Hitler), to prevent the

Negroes from going out of their way from mixing with the Whites.
(*HC*, 68-9)

This invocation of the 'colour-bar' does seem to suggest that Lewis might be less free to 'cohabit with a Negress' than he first thought (it is interesting to note that Lewis imagines himself cohabiting with a Negress, but wedding a Chinese), although he does go on to write that 'there have been many White Europeans, and not the least gifted among them, who preferred the dark skin to the fair. Gaugin [sic] and Baudelaire are hackneyed examples' (*HC*, 69). It is significant that he associates the transgression of this natural 'colour-bar' with artists as it suggests that, as in *The Lion and the Fox*, race is still seen as a 'very great reality' but only for those without 'genius': those with genius are seen as able to transcend race, sexually at least.

Lewis's appeal to 'nature' as a guarantor of order is a confused business: he goes on to write, using the animal metaphors he dislikes, that 'it is far better to leave these things to nature. Nature is not a pedant, not a patriot, but in her rough-and-ready way she sorts out the sheep from the goats. [...] Nature is, if anything, too zealous a divider' (*HC*, 69). Lewis then, after commenting that 'the Negro *has* displayed a certain lack of *empressement* in ascending the cultural ladder', turns his attention to the 'Nazi objections to the participation of "Afro-Americans" in the Berlin Olympic Games' on the grounds that they should be considered as animals and so disqualified (*HC*, 70). Lewis asks whether 'if you equate *deer* and *Negro*, does it mean that you reserve to yourself, because of your white skin, the privileges that as a *man* you possess over the *quadruped*?' (*HC*, 71) His response is that although 'You would not eat him [...] you might find it convenient to shoot him' (*HC*, 71), a response which correctly sees the murderous implications of the dehumanisation inherent in Nazi race-theory. Lewis sees this dehumanisation as ultimately rebounding on to the Nazis themselves, writing that:

all such ways of thinking as those propagated by the Nazis do involve inhumanities [...]. But if you yourself become *inhumane*, it would seem to follow that you descend into a class yourself that is less than human. And then (on the analogy of the Negro and the deer) people will begin to feel that *you* are fair game as well: that it is in order to pot you just as we shoot animals. Which is exactly what is happening in Europe to-day.

By putting others outside the human canon the Germans have, in the sequel, manoeuvred themselves into the same undesirable position. Such a boomerang is a race theory, after all. (*HC*, 71-2)

Sixteen years later this point was made about colonialism by the Martiniquan poet and politician Aimé Césaire, who, using strikingly similar language, wrote that:

colonization, I repeat, dehumanises even the most civilized man; [...] the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out.²⁶

In both cases the argument is basically the same: any system of ideas that sees others as subhuman in some way creates a category that will 'boomerang' back on to the people who originally constructed the system of ideas for their own benefit, or, as Lewis put it 'once you start erecting barriers you are apt to end by finding yourself *outside*, instead of inside, as you had thought' (*HC*, 72). What is interesting about Lewis's position in *The Hitler Cult* is that he invokes and constructs barriers as well as offering the above critique of them: the usual disparity between his racial theory and his racial rhetoric is at work. This can be seen in his use and rejection of zoological metaphors for humans, his approval of miscegenation and his invocation of the 'colour-bar', and his own lazy racism and his sound objections to Nazi racism. In all these cases Lewis is seemingly attracted by racial rhetoric as a way of describing others but is

²⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, first published in French 1955, trans. J. Pinkham, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), p. 41.

also aware of the 'boomerang effect' of such rhetoric, the way in which, theoretically at least, it rebounds to affect his own status as human. As with *Paleface* the true meaning of *The Hitler Cult* cannot be found by choosing between the two positions – racist or anti-racist – contained within the text but is rather to be located in their coexistence: it is in the coming together of the 'two general forms' of twentieth-century thinking on race, as identified by Goldberg, within a single argument that the meaning of *The Hitler Cult* and Lewis's writing on race in general is to be found. The first of those 'two general forms', the one which 'accepts the standard biological sense of race' and sees it as a reality underlying social epiphenomena, was very much a reaction to the transformation and destabilising of pre-modern guarantors of order and meaning – relatively unchanging social status, religion – whereas the second, which saw race 'as mystificatory, a form of (self-deceived) false consciousness or misleading ideology', can be seen as a response to the reaction by those who stood to benefit the most from the possibilities that modernity brought with it. Lewis is trapped between these two positions: the first represents many of the values – aloofness, stability, hierarchy – that he wanted to preserve but to which, as an avant-garde artist of dual nationality, no 'breeding', and uncertain finances, he had no 'natural' or inherited claim; whereas the second held open the possibility that 'men from nowhere' like himself could gain some of the privileges previously only available to the established elites, although it simultaneously undermined the structures and assumptions that had underpinned and made possible such privilege.

Zygmunt Bauman emphasises the importance of boundaries in modern racism, writing that 'Whatever remained of old boundaries needed desperate defence, and new boundaries had to be built around new identities – this time, moreover, under conditions of universal movement and accelerating change.'²⁷ Boundary drawing is clearly of importance to Lewis, and almost everywhere in his work he insists on the bounded and defined against the unconstrained and amorphous, but it is an almost

²⁷ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 60.

abstract activity, detached from any stable referent or values: Lewis wanted there to be boundaries but he could not actually specify what it was that needed 'desperate defence' and so the boundary-drawing exercise became something like an empty formal gesture. The boundaries that others drew around bodies, or on the basis of bodily difference, were replicated in Lewis's work but the bodily basis could not be replicated so easily and in effect the boundaries became groundless, referring to a vague idea of clashing consciousnesses that seemed to be, on the level of rhetoric at least, based on the body, but ultimately was not based on anything other than a perceived but unjustified need for there to be boundaries in place to protect something equally unspecified.

Lewis, as we have seen in *The Hitler Cult*, was at times aware of the impact of boundary drawing on those who did the drawing but also felt a need for a clarity and rigidity in social order and a clear distinction between different types of people that required boundaries. Because of the rapid social changes that occurred in modernity social boundaries and separation could no longer just be assumed but had to be actively constructed: with specific reference to the Jews Bauman writes that

With the rise of modernity, separation of the Jews did become an issue. Like everything else in modern society, it had now to be manufactured, built up, rationally argued, technologically designed, administered, monitored and managed.²⁸

In his discussions of race Lewis seems to be aware of this newly artificial nature of racial boundaries: despite his sporadic appeals to nature, the racial boundaries he invokes are overwhelmingly selected on grounds of what he sees as political expediency – they are expressions not of a natural order, but of an artificial order that he hopes will work to ensure his own safety. Lewis wrote in *The Art of Being Ruled* that:

²⁸ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 57.

the character of our civilization, as defined by the great discoveries of modern science, with their unifying effect, must tend very rapidly not only to world-wide standardization, but to racial fusion. Or rather, this must be the consequence of the new conditions, unless this process is artificially held up, and national idiosyncrasies and differences artificially preserved and fostered, [...]. (*ABR*, 109)

His appeal to the 'ethnologically indefensible' concept of the Aryan race in *Hitler* can be seen as an attempt to 'artificially' hold up such a 'racial fusion' and while I do not want to excuse in any way the stupidity of his support for Nazism, it is important that we remain aware of the ambiguous position of the concept of race in Lewis's work and do not lazily assume that he simply reflected uncritically the standard doctrine of the Nazis. Indeed, given his ambiguous attitudes towards the reality of the body and its place in determining consciousness it should come as no surprise that Lewis did not share the faith in biologically grounded accounts of identity and the sense of self-evident biological superiority that were central to Nazi racial thinking.

America and Cosmic Man:

'The Case Against Roots'

The antipathy Lewis expressed to race in *The Lion and the Fox* and to roots and 'the Real' in *Time and Western Man* was given one final airing in *America and Cosmic Man* (1948), in which he presented an illusory vision of the United States of America as a place in which all roots are erased and people somehow exist in a disembodied and entirely superficial paradise. Lewis begins his argument by contesting what he sees as the generally accepted 'notion that to *have roots* (as if one were a vegetable or a plant) is a good thing for a man: that to be *rootless* is a bad thing for a man' (ACM, 164). Lewis states that the 'exact contrary, of course, is the case' and that 'to be rooted like a tree to one spot, or at best to be tethered like a goat to one small area, is not a destiny in itself at all desirable' (ACM, 164-5). To be rooted is somehow to be less than human, it is a state, in Lewis's eyes, that is animal or vegetable: yet again the issue of race and origins blends into the question of what it is to be human, of what it is that separates and makes humans distinct from lower forms of life. Lewis writes that:

I feel most at home in the United States, not because it is intrinsically a more interesting country, but because no one really belongs there any more than I do. We are all there together in its wholly excellent vacuum.

The sight of the *root* depresses me; and I know in that country that everyone has left his roots over in Poland or Ireland, in Italy, or in Russia, so we are all floating around in a rootless elysium. (ACM, 165)

This utopia of superficiality is characterised by 'a most pleasant disembodied sensation' and as an 'escape from the family' (ACM, 167) and it seems that Lewis envisages the United States of America as a place where one also escapes any significant contact with other people:

I am quite serious when I say that this is what Heaven must be like – agreeably inhuman, naturally; a rootless, irresponsible city [...], where the spirit is released from all the too-close contacts with other

people (others who get “in your hair,” or are all the time “underfoot”) but where everything is superficially fraternal. (*ACM*, 167)

Lewis can ultimately only imagine an escape from roots, from what he sees as the determining presence of the racialised or nationalised body, as an escape from the body and from those ‘others who “get in your hair”’, that is to say as escape from human reality altogether. The release of the ‘spirit’ he imagines happening in America is also an ‘escape from the family’, that is an escape from those others who are directly responsible for one’s own physical existence. For Lewis, it seems, the very fact that people are born, that people are bodies which emerge from the body of another, means that complete freedom and autonomy can never be achieved. The anti-racist strand in Lewis’s thought ends up as thoroughly anti-biological and anti-human: Lewis does seem to be able to imagine bodies that are not racialised or nationalised in some way and so the only way he can imagine an escape from the racial and national conflict of Europe is to escape from both Europe and the body entirely and enter into an utterly superficial image of America, that exists only as a disembodied and post-modern illusion in Lewis’s own imagination.²⁹ Rather than re-imagine the body in a non-racial way Lewis ended up imagining it away altogether, in a move which displays the inattention to and non-recognition of physical reality that his best work warns against. *America and Cosmic Man* brings together Lewis’s antipathy to both ‘the Real’ and ‘race’ in a vision of America in which awkward materiality has been entirely disposed of, and the physical world with all its entanglements and connections has become nothing but an ungrounded world of superficial images. However, as Lewis’s fiction shows, ‘the Real’ can not be avoided entirely, and the complacent idealism of *America and Cosmic Man* is just a fantasy, in the

²⁹ Dennis Brown has argued that *America and Cosmic Man* ‘prophesies the postmodern’: this may well be the case, but the vision of ‘postmodernity’ that Lewis prophesies is an entirely crass and unreal one. See Dennis Brown, ‘Prophesying the Postmodern: Wyndham Lewis’s *America and Cosmic Man*’ in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 5, 1998), pp. 9-22.

common sense of the word – a deluded and ungrounded piece of wishful thinking that cannot be sustained in the real world.

Chapter Five: The Crowd

The question of the relationship of the individual to the crowd is a central one in Lewis's work, as it is in the culture of modernity in general. In this chapter I will examine Lewis's treatment of the crowd and chart the changes in how he imagines it and conceptualises its relation to the individual. I will look at one of Lewis's early fictional works, 'The Crowdmaster' (1915) and the revised version of it published in *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937); 'The Code of a Herdsman' (1917), a fictional manifesto published as a supplement to the *Imaginary Letters* discussed in the Introduction; a number of essays from the 1920s and 1930s – 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time' (1922), 'The Politics of Artistic Expression' (1925), 'The Foxes' Case' (1925), and 'The Artist as Crowd' (1932); and finally the satirical novel *The Apes of God* (1930).

Lewis did not have a single consistent attitude to the crowd or to the individual but throughout his work some persistent images, ideas, and patterns can be discerned: that not everyone is an individual; the crowd as an undifferentiated mass; the crowd as feminine; the crowd as hostile to the individual; the individual as vulnerable to the crowd; the interdependence of the individual and the crowd. The recurrence of images of the crowd in his work attest to its significance for Lewis, the variety of those images to the fact that it was a problematic phenomenon for him.

Lewis was, of course, not the only modern intellectual concerned with the crowd. In his extremely useful history of crowd theory, *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti* (1989), J.S. McClelland charts the way it emerges and develops in modern times in the work of thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle, Hippolyte Taine, and Gustave Le Bon. McClelland argues that 'the Western tradition of political thought' begins with the 'profoundly

anti-democratic bias' of classical theorists such as Plato.¹ Although McClelland is careful to document the classical origins of crowd theory, he sees the 'mid nineteenth century' as the 'turning point in the history of the idea of the crowd', writing that 'from that time onwards at least any exercise in social theory which did not make room for the crowd at its centre looked makeshift, mistaken, or wilfully obtuse'. At this point in history, 'The crowd', McClelland writes, 'began to appear in any number of different guises: frenzied mob, misunderstood people, duped politics-fodder, vehicle of the ancient urge for justice, agent of regression to an animal past, threat to the present, hope for the future'.² Some of these guises, most notably the more pessimistic ones, play a significant role in Lewis's work.

McClelland argues that:

This important theoretical shift towards the crowd has its parallel in the world of politics. The crowd was claiming more of the attention of rulers at the same time as it was pushing its way into the centre of theoretical concern, and after 1848 a large part of the story of the invention of the modern state, its secret and not so secret police, its laws and gaols, its list of suspects and its contingency plans, its first tentative movements towards social welfare as a social palliative and its longing for conscription as a way of disciplining the unruly (the English crowd psychologist Wilfred Trotter called the armies of the Great War "killing crowds") could be written as the modern state's attempt to accommodate itself to and to cope with the crowd. The crowd was fast on its way to become a permanent threat to established patterns of social living, to a stable political order, and to a received notion of culture.³

Lewis's work is inspired not only by the crowds of revolutionary France and the 'killing crowds' of the Great War, but also by the crowds of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the crowds of the British General Strike of 1926, an event which he saw as a failed revolution.⁴ Lewis's work is

¹ J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 2.

² McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob*, p. 3.

³ McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob*, p. 3.

⁴ See Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, pp. 304, 341-2.

therefore informed not only by the idea of the crowd as a lethal threat but also by the idea that it can be nothing more than an absurd spectacle, effecting no real change. Lewis has a perception of the crowd as both threatening mob and manipulable mass, as a revolutionary force and the passive fodder of consumer society.

I will not dwell on the detail of the history of crowd theory, but it is worth noting, in light of the ideas discussed in Chapter One, that associations had been made between the crowd and problems of reality. Thomas Carlyle, for example, in *The French Revolution* (1837) sees the crowd as an irruption of genuine reality into a world of staid appearance:

Man's Existence had for long generations rested on mere formulas which were grown hollow by course of time; and it seemed as if no Reality any longer existed, but only Phantasms of realities, and God's Universe were the work of the Tailor and the Upholsterer mainly, and men were buckram masks that went about becking and grimacing there, – on a sudden the Earth yawns asunder, and amid Tartarean smoke, and glare of fierce brightness, rises SANSCULOTTISM, many-headed, fire-breathing, and asks: What think you of me? Well may the buckram masks start together, terror-struck; “into expressive well-concerted groups!” It is indeed, Friends, a most singular, most fatal thing. Let whosoever is but buckram and phantasm look to it: ill verily may it fare with him; here methinks he cannot much longer be. Wo also to many a one who is not wholly buckram, but partly real and human! The age of Miracles has come back!⁵

Carlyle's images of men as 'buckram masks' is not dissimilar to the unreal world imagined by Lewis in *The Revenge for Love* and elsewhere, but the glee with which he relates the violent rise of the crowd and the terror of the phantasms is completely different to anything to be found in Lewis's work. In Carlyle the rise of the crowd is figured with something like the 'passion for the Real' that Lewis sought to avoid, but in both writers reality is seen as dualistic, and politics is seen to have an ontological dimension: the crowd not only changes social structures, but transforms the fabric of reality itself.

⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, 2 Vols., (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1955), Vol. 1, p. 171.

In Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895) – a best-selling and influential work which McClelland sees as derivative and sensationalist, and which he claims 'gives the lie to the idea that there is necessarily something furtive about plagiarism'⁶ – the problem of the crowd is also seen as a problem of reality. Le Bon sees the crowd as one of the defining features of modernity: 'The substitution of the unconscious action of crowds for the conscious activity of individuals is one of the principal characteristics of the present age'.⁷ This replacement of the conscious by the unconscious was also one of Lewis's great concerns. However, Le Bon's epistemology of the crowd is framed not only in terms of consciousness but of reality as well. Le Bon makes a distinction between 'pure reason' and 'practical reason', and claims that their teachings 'are very often contrary'.⁸ Le Bon's distinction relies on the difference between things as they really are and things as they appear to be:

From the point of view of absolute truth a cube or a circle are invariable geometrical figures, rigorously defined by certain formulas. From the point of view of the impression they make on our eye these geometrical figures may assume very varied shapes. By perspective the cube may be transformed into a pyramid or a square, the circle into an ellipse or a straight line. Moreover, the consideration of these fictitious shapes is far more important than that of the real shapes, for it is they and they alone that we see and that can be reproduced in photography or in pictures.⁹

Le Bon concludes that 'In certain cases there is more truth in the unreal than in the real', a claim which chimes with Lewis's assertion that 'We are surface-creatures, and the "truths" from beneath the surface contradict our values' (*TWM*, 377). Like Lewis, Le Bon sees 'the real' as inaccessible, writing that:

⁶ McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob*, p. 197.

⁷ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd*, first published in French 1895, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 3.

⁸ Le Bon, *The Crowd*, p. 5.

⁹ Le Bon, *The Crowd*, p. 5.

Visible phenomena appear to be the result of an immense, unconscious working, that as a rule is beyond the reach of our analysis. Perceptible phenomena may be compared to the waves, which are the expression on the surface of the ocean of deep-lying disturbances of which we know nothing.¹⁰

These images of waves and ocean depths are extremely similar to those used by Lewis in *Time and Western Man*,¹¹ and suggest that both thinkers share a similar epistemology. There is, however, an ambiguity in Le Bon's dualism, for he sees the crowd both as the surface phenomenon, guided by unconscious motives, and as those unconscious motives in person: writing both that, at times, crowds 'appear to be guided by [...] mysterious forces', and that 'Crowds [...] are always unconscious'.¹²

In *Time and Western Man* Lewis also associated the crowd and the unconscious, and sees these phenomena as forming one side of the defining conflict of modern life:

In any case, a long time ago a battle was engaged between the *Unconscious* and the *Conscious*: and we have been witnessing the ultimate triumph of the *Unconscious* of recent years. The *Individual* and that part of him that is *not* individual, also joined issue: for the civil war was taken up, in the interior economy of the personality, sympathetically, at once. Inside us also the crowds were pitted against the Individual, the Unconscious against the Conscious, the "emotional" against the "intellectual," the Many against the One. So it is that *the Subject* is not gently reasoned out of, but violently hounded from, every cell of the organism: until at last (arguing that "independent," individual life is not worthwhile, nor the game worth the candle) he plunges into the *Unconscious*, where Dr. Freud, like a sort of mephistophelian Dr. Caligari, is waiting for him. (*TWM*, 300-1)

Lewis's explicit association of the unconscious with the crowd makes clear that one strand of his thinking at least is in the same vein as Le Bon's. This passage also makes clear that Lewis saw the crowd not only as a political

¹⁰ Le Bon, *The Crowd*, p. 6.

¹¹ For example, Lewis writes of 'a multiplicity of wave-like surface changes only, while all the time the deep bed of Oneness reposes unbroken underneath' (*TWM*, 377). See Chapter One for a fuller discussion of this passage.

¹² Le Bon, *The Crowd*, pp. 6-7.

phenomenon external to the individual but as a physiological problem internal to the individual as well: the crowds of the unconscious are 'Inside us' as well as outside. The unconscious, and hence the crowd, is seen as identical to the life of unmediated sensation associated with 'the Real':

The "Unconscious" is really what Plato meant by the "mob of the senses," or rather it is where they are to be found, the mother region of "sensational" life. It is in our "Unconscious" that we live in a state of common humanity. There are no *individuals* in the Unconscious; because a man is only an individual when he is *conscious*. (TWM, 301)

This epistemological aspect of the idea of the crowd is significant, and suggests that there is a parallel between the suppression of the crowd and the repression of 'the Real'. As we have seen, the repression of 'the Real' was never fully achieved in Lewis's imaginative work, even though it is a mainstay of his theory. When viewed in this light, the individual is a function of 'reality', and as such a product of belief. We have seen in previous chapters that alongside Lewis's valorisation of such figures he had a strong sense of their fragility, their absurdity, and even their impossibility. The tension between Lewis's values and his perception is also a feature of Lewis's thinking about crowds and individuals, and as we will see it was an uneasy and imaginatively fertile one.

‘The Crowd Master’:

‘to be of the Crowd and individually conscious’

Lewis’s first fictional engagement with the crowd was in ‘The Crowd Master’, a fragment of an envisaged larger work, published in the second number of *Blast* (1915). The narrative is set in July 1914, a month before Great Britain entered the First World War, and follows a character called Blenner as he travels from Scotland, where he heard the news of German’s declaration of war on Russia, to London, where he encounters crowds of patriotic volunteers, and meets a friend of his, an American called Multum, who has written a book titled ‘The Crowd Master’. Jeffrey Meyers, a biographer of Lewis, sees ‘The Crowd Master’ as ‘a description of the blind masses roaring for their own destruction when war is declared’,¹³ but the narrative is concerned as much with the figure of the individual as it is with the crowd, and, as we will see, the individual it opposes to ‘the blind masses’ is not simply distinct and free from the crowd but caught up with it in a complex relationship. The narrative stops, rather than ends, with the promise that ‘Further parts will be printed in the next number of “Blast”’, but because of the war whose beginning is charted in the story there was no next number and the further parts did not materialise until 1937 when a revised version of ‘The Crowd Master’ was published in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Lewis’s first autobiography, under the chapter headings ‘Morpeth Olympiad’, ‘Journey during Mobilization’, and ‘The War-Crowds, 1914’ (*BB*, 66-83). The journey from Scotland to London is based on one that Lewis took himself during mobilisation,¹⁴ which may explain why he felt it appropriate to include, suitably revised, in his autobiography. The second version follows the same basic sequence as the first, although there are some key differences: the main character has been renamed Cantleman (Lewis’s short story ‘Cantleman’s Spring-Mate’, featuring a protagonist of

¹³ Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 77.

¹⁴ Paul O’Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, (London: Pimlico, 2001), p. 172.

the same name was reprinted in the same volume); the Multum character and his book have been completely removed; and Cantleman engages in some intriguing ‘crowd experiments’.

It is unclear whether the second version of ‘The Crowd Master’ was a straight reprint of basically unrevised material, both published and unpublished, from 1915 or whether it should be regarded as a work of 1937. Lewis presents it as the former, claiming that he is ‘hand[ing] over the controls to Cantleman’, and that the reader ‘shall see these things as I saw them, yes, but out of the eyes of a mask called “Cantleman”’ (*BB*, 65). When the two versions are examined closely, a number of significant and revealing differences emerge, which cast light on Lewis’s changing attitudes to the crowd and the individual.

The description of the crowd that the protagonist encounters in London is more or less the same in both versions, with the major revisions being to the way the protagonist reacts to it. The crowd is described in ways which emphasise its mindlessness and suggests that it is some sort of grotesque organism. At the beginning of the text the crowd is described in liquid terms:

Men drift in thrilling masses past the Admiralty, cold night tide. Their throng creeps round corners, breaks faintly here and there up against a railing barring from possible sights. Local ebullience and thickening: some madman disturbing their depths with baffling and recondite noise. (‘Crowd’, 94)

The idea that the crowd is some sort of liquid suggests an involuntariness of movement: like a liquid, the crowd seems to spread out indiscriminately to fill all the available space; and the image of the tide implies that the crowd are controlled by elemental forces of which it is as unconscious as water is of gravity. Even the effects of the ‘baffling and recondite noise’ of the ‘madman’ is figured in terms which suggest an automatic reaction of the kind which makes liquids boil and reduce when heated sufficiently. The passivity and malleability suggested by the image of the crowd as liquid is reinforced by the description of their treatment by the police:

THE POLICE with distant icy contempt herd London. They shift it in lumps here and there, touching and shaping with heavy delicate professional fingers. Their attitude is as though these universal crowds wanted some vague new Suffrage. ('Crowd', 94)

The 'icy', and thus solid, police are presented as having the power to 'shape' the crowd, which again suggests its pliancy and lack of initiative. Two new tropes are introduced in this passage which will prove to be significant in Lewis's work: the crowd as herd, and the crowd as feminine. The fact that these two tropes are introduced more or less simultaneously suggests that they may be practically identical: the crowd is a herd because it is feminine, and is feminine because it is a herd. The implications of the idea that the crowd is feminine will be explored further later on in the chapter.

The crowd is also associated with war, not just the particular war that was beginning at that time but war in general, and with death

THE INDIVIDUAL and THE CROWD: PEACE and WAR.

Man's solitude and Peace; Man's Community and Row.

The Bachelor and the Husband-Crowd. The Married Man is the Symbol of the Crowd: his function is to set one going. At the altar he embraces Death.

We all shed our small skin periodically or are apt to sometime, and are purged in big being: an empty throb.

Men resist death with horror when their time comes.

Death is, however, only a form of Crowd. It is a similar surrender. For most men believe in some such survival, children an active and definite one.

Again, the Crowd in Life spells death too, very often. The Crowd is an immense anaesthetic towards death. Duty flings the selfish will into this relaxed vortex. ('Crowd', 94)

Another key opposition of Lewis's is introduced here: the individual and the crowd. The crowd is seen as antithetical to the individual as entry into it involves a breakdown of the boundary of the individual – the shedding of 'our small skin' – and a 'surrender' to a larger entity, a 'big being' that is, however, just an 'empty throb'. This loss of individuality in the crowd is

seen as analogous to the loss of life that is death. The association of the crowd with the loss of individual conscience and destructive tendencies is common in modern crowd theory which, particularly in its considerations of revolutions, often focuses on the mob's potential for animal violence.¹⁵ The English psychologist Wilfred Trotter, in his influential book *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (1915), saw the formation of crowds as a natural reaction of human being, a 'gregarious species', to the outbreak of war:

The first feeling of the ordinary citizen [at the outbreak of the Great War] was fear [...]. Side by side with fear there was a heightening of the normal intolerance of isolation. Loneliness became an urgently unpleasant feeling, and the individual experienced an intense and active desire for the company and even physical contact of his fellows. In such company he was aware of a great accession of confidence, courage, and moral power.¹⁶

'The Crowd Master' depicts the forming of such a crowd, which is at first figured as infantile:

The Crowd was still blind, with a first puppy-like intensity.

Great National events are always preparing, the Crowd is in its habitual childish sleep. It rises to meet the crash half awake and struggling and voluptuous movements. ('Crowd', 98)

The patronising superiority that is implied by the likening of the crowd to a puppy is tempered by the suggestion that the crowd is a natural phenomenon, which lies dormant before coming to the boil at appropriate moments, functioning like a storage reservoir of national enthusiasm. The idea of the crowd as an elemental or atavistic force is not unique to Lewis, indeed it is one of the key ideas of crowd theory, central to the image of it as crude and unsophisticated but immensely powerful, and to the Enlightenment conceit that, like all natural phenomena, it can be subdued

¹⁵ See, for example, McClelland on Taine, *The Crowd and the Mob*, pp. 127-37.

¹⁶ Wilfred Trotter, *Instinct of the Herd in Peace and War*, first published 1915, (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 110-11.

and harnessed by the power of human rationality. The idea of the crowd as natural and atavistic can also lead to almost mystical accounts of its power, and Lewis presents it in quasi-religious terms: 'Every acquaintance Blenner met was a new person. The only possibility of renewal for the individual is into this temporary Death and Resurrection of the Crowd' ('Crowd', 98). This account of the crowd as the source of a spiritual rebirth is retained in the second version, but significantly with a snide 'it appears' tagged on the end of the sentence (*BB*, 77). Significantly the reaction of Cattleman is described at greater length, and in terms which emphasise his separateness from the crowd:

The war was like a great new fashion. Cattleman conformed. He became a man of fashion. But he was cold in the midst of the Mêleé. In the first days he experienced nothing but a penetrating interest in all that was taking place. His detachment was complete and his attention was directed everywhere. His movements resembled those of a freelance cinema-operator. (*BB*, 77)

The coldness and detachment of Cattleman is not attributed to Blenner who reacts to the crowd far more enthusiastically. This difference between the two versions suggests that in 1937 Lewis was eager that his now avowed alter-ego display a separateness from the crowd that he was not given in 1915. The possible reasons for such a shift will be discussed later, but it is worth noting now that Lewis presents Cattleman's movements in the crowd as being like 'those of a freelance cinema-operator', a figure whose detachment is due to his function as observer and recorder of the crowd in which he is immersed.

In the first version of 'The Crowd Master' Blenner is to some degree carried away by this force of renewal, and it is Multum who is seen as resisting the crowd and remaining separate from it.

Blenner was not too critical a man to penetrate their disguises or ferret out their Ego. He was glad to see so little of it for once.

Delightful masquerade of everyone. The certainty of feeling alike with everyone else was a great relief for over-paradoxical nerves – with everyone except Multum, who was as Crowd-proof as a Scotch

reservist. You could be less than ever certain that you were feeling like him. But he was a professional Crowd-officer. ('Crowd', 98)

Multum's position in the crowd is similar to the one that Lewis would later give to Cattleman:

He had a rather mysterious air; something up his sleeve, apparently.

Whenever the Crowd raised its head he had this faintly bantering mysterious air.

He appeared to be the only conscious atom of the Crowd. A special privilege with him: to be of the Crowd and individually conscious. ('Crowd', 99)

Multum is distinct from the crowd and from Blenner because of his ability to be of the crowd, to experience what it experiences, and at the same time to remain himself and retain his sense of individuality, and perhaps, unlike Blenner, to be critical enough to penetrate the disguises of the people in the crowd. Multum is able to understand the crowd enough to write a book about it, a book which, as its title – 'The Crowd Master' – suggests further emphasises his fundamental detachment from and superiority to the crowd of which he can become part. The inclusion of a work of crowd-theory in the narrative is significant as it demonstrates an awareness that the crowd was a theoretical and literary phenomenon as well as a social one. Blenner's response to the Multum's book is interesting as it shows that for him the title has an immediate appeal that borders on the mindless:

THE CROWD MASTER. What might that mean? His bright astonished eyes fixed on the words, drinking up a certain strength from them.

An opposition of and welding of the two heaviest words that stand for the multitude on the one hand, the Ego on the other.

That should be something!

Did it really mean Master of the Crowd in the sense of possessive domination by an individual? It meant something else, it seemed evident. ('Crowd', 99-100)

Despite Blenner's speculative astonishment at the book's title, his reading does not extend any further:

Buying a book with him was like some men's going to the doctor: those who are cured by the passing of the professional hall door. There was nothing really the matter with Blenner. The moment he had got the book, the expense was justified[.] He seldom read it. Then he chafed at the fee. ('Crowd', 100)

We later learn that 'Blenner [...] had never really read Multum's book. He turned to it, and [...] found it "stimulating"' ('Crowd', 101). Blenner's attraction by a few choice and important sounding words and the ease with which he parts with his cash suggest an imprudent and suggestible spontaneity, qualities often associated with the idea of 'the crowd'. The fact that he does not read the book but considers its purchase effort enough indicates a basic deficiency in his attempt to be intellectual. The attitude of superiority to the crowd which Blenner displays is shown to be practically groundless: he is exposed as merely a pseudo-crowd-master, a member of the crowd who would like to be its master but who cannot even summon up the intellectual energy to read a book.

Multum on the other hand appears to be a more genuine crowd master, not in the sense of a crowd leader, but in a more Baudelairean fashion. In his prose poem 'The Crowds' (1861) Charles Baudelaire wrote of the poet having a special relationship to the crowd:

Not everyone has the gift of taking a plunge into the multitude: there is an art to enjoying the crowd; and they alone can draw from the human race a feast of vitality on whom a fairy has bestowed, while they were in their cradles, a taste for disguise and masks, a hatred of home life, and a passion for travel.

Multitude and solitude: equal and interchangeable terms for the poet who is active and productive. Those who are not able to people the solitude are equally unable to be alone in a busy crowd.

The poet benefits from an incomparable privilege which allows him to be, at will, himself and others. Like those wandering souls in

search of a body, he enters, when he so desires, into the character of each individual.¹⁷

With his 'special privilege' of being able 'to be of the Crowd and individually conscious' Multum seems to approximate to this Baudelairean ideal: 'to be, at will, himself and others'. It is precisely this simultaneous detachment from and empathetic understanding of the crowd that Cantleman, the character who replaces Blenner as protagonist, tries to achieve with his crowd experiment in the second version of 'The Crowd Master'. As we will see, Lewis's revised character is ultimately unable to claim the 'incomparable privilege' that Baudelaire accords to the poet, and the nineteenth-century ideal of the *flaneur* undergoes something of a pratfall.

There are significant differences between the characters of Blenner and Cantleman. Blenner is an ex-soldier with a troublesome leg, rather like the eponymous protagonist of *Snooty Baronet* (1932). When Blenner left the army he 'became definitely, to his family's distress, a crank and very liberal, he began reading sociological books and wandering about London' ('Crowd', 99). Cantleman, on the other hand, is a producer of books rather than a consumer: whereas Blenner buys Multum's book in 'The Bomb shop' ('Crowd', 99), Cantleman 'saboted the Bomb Shop, where his books sold well' (*BB*, 76). Cantleman seems to have absorbed the role played by Multum in the first version, and although the precise nature of his 'bombs' is not revealed, he takes the place of the author of 'The Crowd Master'. Cantleman is also involved in the production of a 'review' much as Lewis was in 1914 (the first issue appeared 1 July 1914). By making Cantleman an artist and a writer Lewis is in one sense making the character more autobiographical, but it is possible that his revisions, although more 'truthful' in career terms, obscure some of the unflattering truths of the first version by excising the protagonist's passive and crowd-like dependence on a sensationalist book he has never read, his admiration of

¹⁷ Charles Baudelaire, 'The Crowds' in *The Prose Poems and La Fanfarlo*, trans. Rosemary Lloyd, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 44.

its charismatic author, and his attraction to the crowd. Blenner leaves Scotland because he 'felt the need of the great Crowd' that he could find in London rather than the 'imperfect Crowd' that he finds in Scotland: 'the numbers being so slight, it was like a straining and dissatisfaction in Blenner, the pale edge of the mass he knew now would be forming, finding once more the immense common nature of its being' ('Crowd', 95). The omission of the protagonist's desire for the 'common nature' of the crowd in the second version is significant as it indicates that such a desire was not one that Lewis wanted associated with his autobiographical image. There are two possible reasons for this: either the prospect of admitting to such a feeling embarrassed him as it detracted from his image as a cantankerous and stubbornly individual outsider; or given his experience of the First World War, and indeed the anti-war tone of *Blasting and Bombardiering* and his pacifist and pro-appeasement sentiments of the late 1930s, any sign of earlier pro-war enthusiasm would seem inappropriate. Whatever the immediate reason may have been for the omission of this desire for 'common nature' it indicates again that there is a repression of a basic physical commonality operating in Lewis's work. Just as, in *Enemy of the Stars*, Arghol tries to deny the truth, articulated by Hanp, that 'all our flesh is the same', so Lewis, in his revision of 'The Crowd Master', seeks to repress the presence, and indeed the desirability, of the 'common nature' of the crowd. In the second version of 'The Crowd Master' Cantleman is drawn to the crowd not by a desire to become part of it, but in order to exploit it as a source of inspiration for his writing. Cantleman embarks on a series of 'crowd-experiments' which involve an attempt to become, like Multum, both of the crowd and critically detached from it. Cantleman deliberately lets himself be absorbed by the crowd in the hope that he will come to understand it:

He allowed himself to be carried by the crowd. He offered himself to its emotion, which saturated him at length. When it had sunk in, he examined it. Apparently it was sluggish electricity. That was all. As such it had no meaning, beyond what the power of a great body of water has, for instance. It conducted nowhere : it was aimlessly

flowing through these torpid coils. The human cables had been disposed no doubt by skilful brains : they might be admirable. But not the electricity. (*BB*, 80)

Even though the crowd offers Cantleman no distinct meaning it is not completely mute: 'human messages passed up and down' (*BB*, 80). However, on interpreting these messages Cantleman is disappointed: 'Like the spirit-writing of the *planchette* pencil, they were extremely stupid' (*BB*, 80). The association of the messages of the crowd with those of spiritualism, of which Lewis has a dim view, further reinforces the presentation of the crowd as mindless, just as the electrical imagery suggests, as did the tide imagery earlier, that the crowd is subject to elemental forces it cannot control.

Cantleman tries to channel the emotion of the crowd, rather as a spiritualist medium channels supernatural forces, and his experiment involves him becoming the crowd in some way:

he would not only mix with the crowd, he would train himself *to act its mood*, so that he could persuade its emotion to enter him properly. There he could store it, to some extent. Then he would, from time to time, hasten outside it. In isolation, he would examine himself in the Crowd-mood. (*BB*, 81)

This acting the crowd's mood involves an abandonment of both his body and his mind, in similar fashion to the shedding of 'our small skin' that Blenner felt in the crowd; however in Cantleman's case this abandonment is calculated rather than spontaneous:

He went outside into the crowd again. He sank like a diver. He disposed his body in a certain way, slouching heavily along, fixed his eyes ahead of him. Soon he had become an entranced medium, or the next thing to it. (*BB*, 81)

Cantleman finds his mind wandering, and thinks of 'a bogus countess who was eager to finance a review' of which he was to be editor, and indulges in

fantasies about 'his first number' (*BB*, 81). However, a sensation from the crowd interrupts his day-dreaming:

Suddenly he experienced a distinct and he believed *authentic shock*. It could only come from the crowd! Evidently he had penetrated its mind – the cerebation of this jelly-fish! Hence the sting! He had received his first novel sensation. What was it exactly – could he define it? Well, it seemed to be that he was a *married man*.

Unquestionably he possessed, and with extreme suddenness at that, *that married feeling*. He had never had it before – so he knew it must be genuine. Immediately he withdrew from the crowd. (*BB*, 81)

The sexual language used here – penetration and withdrawal – together with Cantleman's '*married feeling*' indicate that the crowd has a libidinous charge for him, and the '*authentic shock*' he feels upon penetration suggests that he gains some sort of sexual pleasure from the crowd. The image of the crowd as a stinging 'jelly-fish' unites the idea of the crowd as feminine and the idea of the crowd as electrical, as Lewis often associated the feminine with what he called in *Tarr* 'jellyish attributes' (*T*, 314). Cantleman's immediate withdrawal on receiving this shock may suggest that he finds this experience troubling, that perhaps this merging with the crowd is one which calls his sense of detachment into question.

After this 'shock' Cantleman retreats to the masculine shelter of a pub to record the findings of his experiment, and reading them over feels 'disappointed' and returns to the crowd for more. That Cantleman is presented as a writer in the second version of 'The Crowd Master' is significant as it effectively conflates the figure of the artist-intellectual with that of the observant individual detached from the crowd, and suggests that the mastery of the crowd may stem from the act of representing it artistically.

Walking through the crowd 'as mechanically as possible' Cantleman heads for one of London's most famous phallic symbols:

Trafalgar Square was an extensive human lake. He moved towards the Nelson Column. He might obtain a valuable note if he climbed up, upon the plinth. Hoarse voices were muttering all round him. He

felt the pressure of the visible ghosts whom he was inviting to inscribe their ideas on the tabula rasa he offered them.

Their messages continued to be extremely confused. He noticed he had lost ground, even. He felt more and more solitary. Then free – *single*; and so divorced. (BB, 82)

In contrast to his first experimental outing into the crowd, Cantleman now invites the crowd to penetrate his mind, rather than attempting to penetrate its. However, nothing significant happens; rather than feeling an ‘*authentic shock*’ as he did when he penetrated the mind of the crowd, he feels no connection to the crowd at all, only a sense of his apartness. The failure of the crowd to penetrate Cantleman and ‘inscribe their ideas’ on him may reinforce the idea of Cantleman’s detached and impenetrable masculinity, but this failure results in him losing ground. His feeling of being ‘divorced’ suggests a detachment born out of the failure of a previous coupling, rather than one stemming from untroubled masculine independence.

Cantleman’s final attempt to gain a sensation from the crowd results in another sexual feeling, but this time it is not the result of an ‘*authentic shock*’ produced by the crowd but of a strange historical bathing fantasy:

Upon the plinth of the Nelson Column he strained for a distinct sensation. It must this time be distinct. Nothing came at all. He strained again. He felt as detached as the stone Nelson. What a change from Trafalgar! he thought. What a change! Lady Hamilton floated into his mind. She had scent upon her limbs, which were sheathed in tight-fitting bathing drawers. She was going for a dip. She was Britannia. A wave slapped her, roguishly. *Elle faisait le culbute*. Immediately a sensation occurred. Cantleman produced his notebook. (BB, 82)

That Cantleman’s crowd experiments end with this somewhat silly sexual fantasy suggests that they are a failure, and that he has not penetrated the ‘crowd-mood’ but become distracted by the image of a long dead aristocrat. Unlike Multum who was said ‘to be of the Crowd and individually conscious’ Cantleman does not become part of the crowd and his individual consciousness seems too easily distractible to be properly

critical. However, Cantleman sees fit to blame the crowd, rather than himself, for this failure:

The English Crowd is a stupid dragon. It ought not to be allowed out alone! I have lain in it for hours together and have received *no sensation worth noting*. As Crowd it is a washout. (BB, 83)

Cantleman holds the crowd responsible for his lack of inspiration, which suggests that the activity of the artist is dependent on the crowd; that, contrary to Cantleman's ostensible individuality, the artist cannot function without a crowd and that if the crowd is a 'washout' the artist will automatically be so too. The idea of the artist's dependence on the crowd seems to be at odds with the rhetoric of the piece, but here we can see the key tension in Lewis's thinking about crowds. For all his disdain for the crowd Lewis had a strong sense of its inescapability, and never saw the individual as being able to exist completely apart from it.

‘The Code of a Herdsman’:

‘you will grow confused by a similarity’

‘The Code of a Herdsman’ (1917) was first published in *The Little Review* as part of the series of ‘Imaginary Letters’ written by Lewis. The text is presented as a ‘set of rules sent by Benjamin Richard Wing to his young friend, Philip Seddon inclosed with a letter’ (‘Code’, 25), and should be regarded as a fiction authored by Lewis and not, as John Carey does, as an ‘early essay’ and a straightforward manifesto or documentation of his views at that time.¹⁸

‘The Code’ gives advice on how the Herdsman, who is said to dwell on a mountain, should deal with the herd down below, and the text seems to be a fine example of the modern intellectual’s contempt for the modern crowd. The use of such phrases as ‘herd-hypnotism’ and ‘herd personality’ suggests a disdain for the masses which imaginatively continues the anti-crowd tradition of crowd theorists such as Taine and Le Bon. However, as ‘The Crowd Master’ makes clear, Lewis was aware of the tradition of crowd theory as a cultural and publishing phenomenon, and his representation of the relationship of Blenner and Multum shows that he did not automatically assume that its adherents were themselves above or beyond the crowd.

The fictional writer of ‘The Code’ clearly appears to believe himself to be above the crowd and the Herdsman who is the recipient of the text is instructed to have a much more antagonistic attitude to the crowd than that explored in ‘The Crowd Master’:

Mock the herd perpetually with the grimace of its own garrulity or deadness. If it gets out of hand and stampedes towards you, leap on to the sea of mangy backs until the sea is still. That is: cast your mask aside, and spring above them. They cannot see or touch anything *above* them: they have never realized that their backs — or rather their *tops* — exist! They will think that you have vanished into Heaven. (‘Code’, 25-6)

¹⁸ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939*, (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 184.

This mockery is very different to Cattleman's attempt to act the crowd's mood and assumes the distinction between Herd and Herdsman that is mooted but never fully established in 'The Crowd Master'. The Herdsman is warned to 'Always come down with masks and thick clothing' ('Code', 30): the shedding of 'our small skin' associated with the crowd in the first version of 'The Crowd Master' is not an option for the Herdsman. Indeed, the Herdsman is instructed to remain neurotically swaddled at all times: 'Stagnant gasses from these Yahoosque and rotten herds are more dangerous often than the wandering cylinders that emit them. See you are not caught in them without your mask' ('Code', 30). Given this concern about contamination by the Herd, it is perhaps unclear why the Herdsman would want to descend into it in the first place. This question is never raised, let alone answered, and it is a significant chink in 'The Code' as it suggests that the Herdsman's commerce with the Herd is not entirely voluntary. Given the apparently unavoidable fact that the Herdsman must have contact with the Herd, 'The Code' sets out the ways in which the Herdsman's assumed distinction is to be maintained. Complete isolation and detachment, although it may be desirable, is never an option for the Herdsman.

One of the key distinguishing features of the Herdsman is the multiplicity of his personality. Far from being presented as a straightforwardly singular individual, the Herdsman is directed to 'Cherish and develop, side by side, your six most constant indications of different personalities' ('Code', 26). This cultivation of multiple personalities is seen to strengthen rather than dissipate the Herdsman's individuality: 'You will then acquire the potentiality of six men' ('Code', 26). As well as distinguishing himself from the crowd without, the Herdsman carefully develops a crowd within. This celebration of the multiplicity of the personality could be seen as indicating something like the proto-post-modern sophistication of Lewis's thinking: writing of Lewis's rhetorical question 'Why try and give the impression of a consistent and indivisible

personality?’ in *Blast*, No. 2,¹⁹ Toby Avard Foshay speaks of ‘the primary conflict and irresolution of Lewis’s proto-deconstruction’.²⁰ However, it could also be argued that in his theoretical embrace of the multiplicity of the personality Lewis is merely making a virtue of necessity, and claiming responsibility for the unavoidable. Moreover, it seems that by presenting this multiplicity as something that the personality strives for rather than being constituted by, he slyly returns to an effectively singular notion of the personality, albeit in the role of the instigator of its own inevitable fragmentation. The injunction ‘Contradict yourself. In order to live, you must remain broken up’ (‘Code’, 29) shows that fragmentation is to be harnessed in order to sustain the life of the ‘you’. In ‘The Code’ fragmentation, as well as multiplicity, is a strategy pursued for the benefit of the individual, who, although not indivisible as such, remains distinct from and superior to the crowd.

The Herdsman’s attempt to ‘Cherish and develop’ his multiple personalities is an example of crowd control, only this time directed inwards. The notion of an internal crowd is an important one in Lewis’s work but, this crowd is not always so obedient and manageable. Lewis’s recommendation of an ostensibly multiple personality is itself couched in the language of snobbery: ‘Never fall into the vulgarity of being or assuming yourself to be one ego’ (‘Code’, 27). Lewis enacts a partial inversion of a straightforward crowd/individual distinction: the Many are seen as singular, the One as multiple. But despite the apparent celebration of the multiple personality, there is still a ‘yourself’ present who has to be careful not to fall into the ‘vulgarity’ of crowd-like singularity. Lewis does not by any means simply repeat the solipsistic individualism of, say, Max Stirner, the egoistic philosopher rejected by Arghol in *Enemy of the Stars*, but it is clear that the partial inversion of the crowd/individual distinction does not represent its complete refutation or transcendence. Indeed, the

¹⁹ Wyndham Lewis, ‘Wyndham Lewis Vortex No. 1.: Art Vortex: Be Thyself.’, in *Blast*, No. 2, first published 1915, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981).

²⁰ Toby Avard Foshay, *Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde: The Politics of the Intellect*, (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992). p. 78.

multiple-individualism advocated in 'The Code' could be seen as an evolved individualism, which, unable to sustain the complete isolation of the individual, allows in as much of the crowd as it can control in an attempt to stave off its obsolescence.

The Herdsman's rejection of the external Herd extends to social groups traditionally viewed as superior to the general crowd, and 'The Code' carefully makes a distinction between the Herdsmen and the aristocracy. The Herdsman is instructed:

Do not play with political notions, aristocratisms or the reverse, for that is a compromise with the herd. Do not allow yourself to imagine "a fine herd though still a herd." There is no *fine herd*. The cattle that call themselves "gentlemen" you will observe to be a little cleaner. It is merely cunning and produced with a product called *soap*. But you will find no serious difference between them and those vast dismal herds they avoid. Some of them are very dangerous and treacherous.
= Be on your guard with the small herd of gentlemen! (27)

This distinction between the traditional social elites and some idea of a new elite is a feature of Lewis's thought. Lewis seeks to maintain the hierarchical and basically dualistic structure of an aristocratic society, but change its content, so that artist and intellectuals like himself occupy the top rank, rather than established hereditary aristocrats. Despite the rejection of the aristocratic Herd, the Herdsman is not seen as an absolutely unique figure: as the form of 'The Code' makes clear, there are at least two Herdsmen, and the question of whether they are merely 'a fine herd though still a herd' is unavoidable.

The writer of 'The Code' warns the apprentice Herdsman against a 'pitfall' that may be encountered when with the Herd: 'surrounded by the multitude of unsatisfactory replicas, you will grow confused by a similarity bringing them so near to us' ('Code', 27). This 'similarity' may lead the Herdsman to question whether the distinction between himself and the Herd really exists:

You will reason, where, from some point of view, the difference is so slight, whether that delicate margin is of the immense importance that we hold it to be: *the only thing of importance* in fact. = That group of men talking by the fire in your club (you will still remain a member of your club), that party at the theatre, look good enough, you will say. Their skins are fresh, they are well-made, their manners are good. ('Code', 27-8)

The impression of others being 'good enough' is to be countered, so the Herdsman is instructed, by examining them objectively:

You must then consider what they really are. On closer inspection you *know*, from unpleasant experience, that they are nothing but limitations and vulgarities of the most irritating description. The devil Nature has painted these sepulchres pink, and covered them with a blasphemous Bond Street distinction. Matter that has not sufficient mind to permeate it grows, as you know, gangrenous and rotten. Animal high spirits, a little but easily exhausted, goodness, is all that they can claim. ('Code', 28)

Distinction is to be maintained by the sort of objectifying gaze Lewis later theorised in *The Wild Body* essays, and which was discussed in Chapter Two. Indeed, this passage sets out some of the concerns that return throughout Lewis's work, in particular the notion that the appearance that people possess minds and are not merely things, is just that – an appearance – beneath which, in 'the Real', they are merely mindless animal matter. 'The Code of a Herdsman' differs from *The Wild Body* essays in that the consideration of 'what they really are' is not turned back on to the observer himself, and the dangerous possibility that the observer is merely matter as well is avoided. The 'delicate margin' between the Herdsman and the Herd is only one of several such 'slight' yet 'immensely important' differences in Lewis's work: the boundary between 'reality' and 'the Real', the distinction between laughter and laughed-at, and the difference between men and women all hinge on such 'delicate margins'. All these 'delicate margins' are haunted by the possibility that they do not exist, and that a real 'similarity' does.

In his 'Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time' (1922) Lewis argues that the presence of a 'delicate margin' was central to art itself:

In art we are in a sense playing at being what we designate as matter. We are entering the forms of the mighty phenomena around us, and seeing how near we can get to being a river or a star, without actually *becoming* that. ('Essay', 204)

The idea that art allows us to get near to something real without becoming it, that art is a way of enacting a 'delicate margin' between the virtual and the actual, puts art in the role of 'belief' theorised in *Time and Western Man*, and analysed in Chapter One. In terms of the crowds, art could be that which allows individuals to play at belonging to the crowd without actually doing so; or, put in another way, that which allows members of the crowd to believe that they are individuals merely playing at being of the crowd. In the 1920s Lewis became increasingly interested in questions of the social role of art, and the way in which art and artists are related to the crowd.

Art and the Organisation of Society

In his essay 'The Politics of Artistic Expression' (1925) Lewis discusses the relationship of art and society, and argues that art is the unique aspect of human nature which distinguishes us from animals. As well as being constitutive of the uniqueness of humanity Lewis argues that art is necessary to the maintenance of a well-ordered society, and that in contemporary society it is in danger of complete disintegration. Lewis's concern here is not so much with the situation of the individual artist in the crowd, as it was in 'The Crowd Master', but with the role that art can play in regulating the crowd, and maintaining an ordered and stable society. The social function of art is similar to the ontological function of belief, as both guarantee consistency and stability and keep something – 'the Real' or the crowd – safely repressed.

The essay begins with the hypothetical question: 'If the peacock spoke, what would he say? If the peacock painted what would he paint?' ('Politics', 114). He concludes that the hypothetical peacock would 'be in his functional rôle the whole time' and would 'be able to talk about nothing else but the peacock. He would display none of the humility and eclecticism that is such a characteristic of the most highly developed men' ('Politics', 115). The restriction of the peacock's imagination to its 'functional rôle' indicates its fundamental difference from humanity: Lewis argues, the 'principal thing that discriminates men from the other animals is that they desire to escape from themselves' ('Politics', 114). Lewis argues that humans, unlike animals, can imagine themselves to be other than what they are. The importance of art, in Lewis's eyes, stems from the importance of this desire to the unique constitution of human nature:

It is in the fine arts, in their various forms, of course, that [human beings] display their mania for impersonation most clearly when they get the chance. That is a highly organized and humanly respectable way of being anything or anybody that comes into your head. ('Politics', 115)

Art allows people, Lewis argues, imaginatively to take on roles that if they were actually acted out would be dangerous. To illustrate his point, Lewis uses the example of crime fiction, arguing that:

No one accuses the author of *Raffles* of being a cat-burglar by nature or in fact. They quite understand that it is impossible for a “normal” human being to resist (if he gets the chance) impersonating this picturesque form of criminal, or some other equally unwelcome in real life. (‘Politics’, 115)

Crime fiction is seen as a way to indulge a natural desire for illegal activities on a virtual level, without any real consequence: actual criminals are seen as those who are unable to express this desire in this artificial way, and so resort to actually realising it. Art is seen not as doing away with the violent desires imagined in crime fiction, but as regulating them by removing them to the virtual sphere of the aesthetic. Art is seen by Lewis as basically a process of sublimation, which plays a vital regulatory role on the social as well as the individual level. Art, and the virtual experience it allows functions as a non-violent and non-coercive means of maintaining social order:

If there were *no* arts left, of any consequence, half the world would of course have to be policemen to restrain the other half from objectionable impersonations of a necessarily dramatic nature. But these dramatic, strictly unprofitable, and playful peculiarities are peculiar to men. Other animals, in their natural state, have only one rôle, that of their specific function. (‘Politics’, 115)

Art is, paradoxically, seen as ‘strictly unprofitable’ and at the same time as an agent of social cohesion and order, which fulfils the function of the policeman by other means. This functionless yet useful status of art is seen as socially rather than ontologically guaranteed, and as such is susceptible to social change. Lewis’s fear is that the functionless sphere of the virtual is under threat in modern society, and that the illicit and dangerous passions that were indulged in an inconsequential and unreal fashion will become realised:

The fine arts have in the past been the guarantee that this contingency should under all circumstances be avoided. And their collapse would immediately, in precipitating everybody out of make-believe into reality, or tipping the scales to that vitalist side, change us into very dangerous creatures indeed for each other. It is a danger signal always for our race when the fine arts become too *real*; when the cry of *life* is set up in the theatre, as it was in Rome, or at the door of the craftsman's workshop. ('Politics', 116)

With the collapse of art comes the intrusion of 'the Real': the idea of 'the Real' of life supplanting the 'reality' of theatre unenthusiastically repeats Carlyle's notion of the crowd blasting away 'Phantasms of realities'. This collapse of the detached and virtual status of art involves the aesthetic becoming actualised and functional: instead of impersonating other roles people start to act them out in reality. In the language of Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851), another work which figures revolutionary crowds in theatrical terms, Lewis sees the stability of society as dependent on the 'phrase' going beyond the 'content', of what is virtually acted out in the aesthetic realm exceeding what is actually done. For Marx real revolution occurred when 'the content goes beyond the phrase': for Lewis this is also the case, but he sees this prospect as bringing nothing but the disintegration of the carefully organised façade of the 'reality' of civilisation.²¹ Lewis expresses his fear of the breakdown of art in terms familiar from Chapter One: 'Madness, for us, is to be *real*. The reality, without its veil of art, would be insupportable' ('Politics', 116). The unveiling which excited both Carlyle and Marx is seen by Lewis as a shedding of the aesthetic capacity which constitutes humanity, the disintegration of the virtual realm and a slide back into unimaginative animal existence where everyone is restricted to their 'functional rôle'.

Lewis uses a corporeal metaphor for this disintegration of the virtual realm of art. He writes that 'Aesthetic expression is one of the traditional organs of civilized society' and argues that in modern society 'The function

²¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, first published 1851, in *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 302.

of this organ is being distributed all over the organism' ('Politics', 118). The disintegration which Lewis imagines is not only social and aesthetic but physiological as well. The Western aesthetic tradition was also concerned with the proper organisation of the body, in particular the hierarchy of the senses, as indeed was the post-revolutionary French tradition of *idéologie-critique*. In *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (1993) Vincent Sherry has charted the influence of thinkers such as Julien Benda and Remy de Gourmont on Lewis, focusing on the way in which the political discourse of the senses developed in the mainly French tradition of *idéologie-critique* manifests itself in their work. Sherry provides a brief but extremely useful history of *idéologie-critique*, from its progressive roots in post-revolutionary France, to its more reactionary and conservative phase in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, outlining a theory in which the eye and vision became associated with an aristocratic sensibility of order, and the ear and hearing with demotic anarchy and populist demagoguery.²² Sherry argues that this politicised view of the senses was central to Lewis's work, and forms a fundamental connection between his politics and aesthetics: he writes that Lewis's 'ideology of ear and eye [...] provides the structuring, unifying force for his magnum opus of the postwar years'.²³

Lewis sees the collapse of the aesthetic as resulting in a redistribution of the organs of the body, an image that recalls the breakdown of boundaries, both physical and social, experienced in the crowd. For Lewis revolution, with its brushing away of 'Phantasms of realities', is figured as a traumatic reorganisation on both the social and physiological levels. The traditional specialisation and organisation of the body fundamental to the discourse of the aesthetic collapses, and an organism with separate and defined organs is redistributed into an undifferentiated bodily mass, perhaps something like the 'vague profound organs' and 'thick well-

²² Vincent Sherry, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 9-42.

²³ Sherry, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism*, p. 98.

nourished coils' of the crowd imagined in 'The Crowd Master' ('Crowd', 94).

Lewis's use of the particular corporeal metaphor of the organs is also significant as it shows that the distinction that is crucial to Lewis is not between mind and body but between the organised and disorganised body. Just as he does not oppose the 'unreal' to 'the Real' he does not simply counter the corporeal with the incorporeal but with the organised. Lewis does not want to do away with the body altogether, but he wants to ensure that all its parts are in their place and functioning properly. He does not see the 'traditional organ' of 'aesthetic expression' being completely destroyed in modern society but being reorganised in such a way that its traditional, regulatory function is disrupted, and the boundaries that it maintained breached.

The arguments of 'The Politics of Artistic Expression' tend to present art as something distinct from the crowd, perhaps even opposed to it. If the crowd is seen as the state in which humans are at their most animal, then art, being the most uniquely human of pursuits, is very much its antithesis. However, as we saw in 'The Crowd Master', Lewis did not see the figure of the artist as fully detachable from the crowd, and even if art serves to organise and control the crowd, the energy with which inspires art is similar to, if not the same as, that which mobilises the crowd. As we saw in Chapter Four, in *The Lion and the Fox* Lewis saw the relationship of the individual personality to the race in similar terms, writing that the personality 'uses aptitudes and forces that it derives from the things it is destined to combat' (*LF*, 296). This sense of the interconnectedness, even of the consanguinity, of opposed principles is an important feature of Lewis's work, and one which is crucial to his thinking about the crowd.

The Artist and the Crowd, the Artist as Crowd

In his 1925 essay 'The Foxes' Case', parts of which were developed into sections of *The Lion and the Fox* and *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis explores the relationship of both the artist and the hero to the crowd. Lewis's attitude toward the crowd in this essay is typically mixed: he sees the crowd as playing an essential part in the creation of great personalities and works of art, but at the same time sees these as in some way independent of the crowd that produced them. The image of the crowd as female, and the individual as male and in an uneasy sexual relationship with it that was introduced in 'The Crowd Master' is also developed.

Lewis lists 'the conflict between the individual personality and the personality of the crowd' and 'the effect in western countries of the democratic principle on the Person as hero' as among his key concerns in this essay, and the spectre of the masses of modernity is never far away from his arguments ('Foxes', 120). Although these introductory statements suggest Lewis is concerned with a fundamental antagonism between the individual and the crowd, his account of '*The Person and his Origins*', which forms the first section of the essay, begins by suggesting a fundamental similarity between these two principles:

The expansiveness that manifests itself in inventive or expressive work of any sort is essentially a movement to multiply the personality. At its intensest, it is not so very far removed from the consciousness of the crowd, for in multiplying itself a crowd is formed. ('Foxes', 120)

This 'expansiveness' which Lewis sees as characteristic of artistic work, rather than, say, a concentrating and purifying inwardness, is seen as near to the 'consciousness of the crowd' at the level of system rather than of content: it is the process of 'multiplying' that forms the link between the initially opposed principles. As Lewis himself writes:

when we speak of the person or the personality in this connection, it is not as an opposite principle to what is sometimes achieved by numbers. It is of a system of relations concentrated in a certain way. ('Foxes', 120)

This change of focus from the quantitative to the structural could be seen as a way of avoiding contact with the crowd on a theoretical level: the question is now not one of the few and the many, but of different 'system[s] of relations', a reorientation which neatly disposes of the many and eludes the threat that they may have posed to the few. This formalisation of the crowd is a means to contain the crowd on a theoretical level and enables it to be viewed in terms amenable to the intellectual: the sheer physical numerousness and power of the crowd – those threatening features which made it an object of intellectual study in the first place – are soundlessly pushed out of the discussion altogether.

But this formalisation of the crowd is not totally effective: the threatening physicality disposed of returns on a metaphorical level, and the 'system of relations' is characterised in terms of sexual reproduction:

If a thousand people could have a child, as two people can have a child, he would be rather like Shakespeare or Newton, or some other great "personality," according to the quality of the crowd: and the crowd precedes, in that sense, the person, although the person is not the crowd. ('Foxes', 120)

Lewis's attempted formalisation of the crowd slips back into an organic representation of the relation between the person and the crowd, in which the crowd goes forth and produces a person who then, presumably, multiplies his personality in 'inventive or expressive work'. The use of the biological imagery of childbirth here works to suggest that the relation between the great individual and the crowd is a natural one, and as such a stubborn and unalterable fact of human existence. Lewis, however, sees this 'natural' relationship as threatened by modern politics: 'All egalitarian doctrines represent the philosophy of a *childless crowd*' ('Foxes', 120). This link between modernity and infertility is also made in *The Art of*

Being Ruled, where, as discussed in Chapter Three, Lewis sees the First World War as producing an antipathy to reproduction in both men and women, and modernity in general as resulting in a rise of male homosexuality (see Chapter Three above, and *ABR*, 247, 239-40). In ‘The Foxes’ Case’, as in *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis links this lack of reproduction to an evasion of responsibility:

The greatest and most painful responsibility of humanity is its “great men.” When people show signs of wishing to evade this responsibility one can be sure that that society to which they belong is in a bad way, and is probably preparing for dissolution.

A crowd that cannot produce a person, as we understand person here, is a poor crowd, then. But even that is better than that particularly futile form of crowd which produces a lot of undersized, half-hearted, shrunken offsprings. The heroic crowd immediately produces a Lenin or a Shakespeare, even if the person so produced contradicts all the principles presiding at its conjunction. (‘Foxes’, 121-2)

As in the second version of ‘The Crowd Master’ it is the crowd that is blamed for the individual’s lack of greatness: the individual in this respect occupies a rather weak position, dependent on the crowd itself for the power to transcend it into greatness. Like the personality dependent on the very ‘forces’ of race which it ‘combats’, the individual is both in conflict with the crowd and produced by it. Using the language with which Lewis discusses the relationship of masculinity to the feminine in *The Art of Being Ruled*, we could say that the individual is ‘propped up’ from the crowd and is in some way a performative phenomenon. Indeed, when the arguments of ‘The Politics of Artistic Expression’ are taken into account it becomes clear that the crowd is opposed at a fundamental level to the virtuality of performance, representing as it does the animality of the actual.

This invocation of Lewis’s thoughts on gender is not merely an irrelevant yet intriguing bit of cross-referencing, for in ‘The Foxes’ Case’ Lewis presents the relationship of the writer to the crowd of the world in terms which are, in Paul Edwards’ words, ‘offensively gendered’ to

'modern eyes'.²⁴ 'Employing the sexual image', Lewis describes this relationship as a 'very ticklish' situation: 'Charged with words, which are his seeds, he hastens along with a view to finding the organism for which they are destined. That is the instinctive, unreflective procedure, rather, of this fertile person' ('Foxes', 122). This natural 'procedure' of the writer is, however, endangered in the modern world:

But that would hardly describe the writer as we find him today. It is, perhaps, a bad image for writers in general. There are writers who evulgate themselves with the simplicity of birds, it is true, and seem only anxious to find where at best hand their business can be done, and for them the image would hold: but it would not for another sort who take their secret into the most intricate jungle they can find, protected by every allusive trap and device of language. In this way the writer becomes a fabulous beast to be hunted down and ferreted out; he appeals to people's sporting instinct. His "meaning" is stalked, his mental habits charted. He is the hunted and not the hunter, in short. ('Foxes', 122)

Lewis's notion of the enforced feminisation of the modern writer is interesting not only because of the masculine values and anxieties it displays,²⁵ but because he blends this gendered view with one in which the crowd is central:

In the procreation of the intellect there are no sexes, but only numbers. But the Many may roughly be taken to represent the feminine principle. There is one field in which there is the cows, and another in which the bull promenades, or that is the natural arrangement. But today there is one field only, full of cows, and in one corner a small herd of rather bovine and aggressive-looking cows, not unlike bulls. The bull as an entity has vanished. ('Foxes', 124)

The natural and virile 'procedure' of the writer has been replaced by a performance in which the masculine individual masquerades as one of the

²⁴ Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 291.

²⁵ The way in which the hunted and emasculated writer is said to retreat into an obscure and allusive jungle seems to be a critique, 'offensively gendered' no doubt, of the anti-populist difficulty of much modernist writing.

feminine herd. The question 'Are the Crowds then female?' asked in 'The Crowd Master' is answered in the affirmative, but the assumption that the individual opposed to the crowd is male is called into question, and the separation between the male and female fields removed. In the light of Lewis's views on gender in *The Art of Being Ruled*, published the year after 'The Foxes' Case', this is perhaps not surprising: his claim that 'There is no mysterious *difference* between the nature of the sexes' seems compatible with the cow-and-bull picture presented here (*ABR*, 150). However, in 'The Foxes' Case' it is the male who has to perform the role of the female: 'the world's stud-bull, intellectually speaking, must pretend to be a cow; or at least must disguise his function so much that he could pass for one of the herd, unless carefully examined' ('Foxes', 124). In *The Art of Being Ruled*, as discussed in Chapter Three, this situation is reversed and it is an essentially female being which must act the role of the male, but crucially both situations suggest that any notion of a clear separation that Lewis might have envisaged or desired is non-existent. 'The Foxes' Case' presents a vision of modernity in which the natural relationship of masculine individual and feminine crowd has broken down into one amalgamated and neutered field. Yet again, separation is shown to fail.

In the essay 'The Artist as Crowd' (1932) Lewis's conception of the relationship between the crowd and the individual artist changes again. Rather than viewing the artist as an individual somehow born by the crowd, he now claims that artists are crowds: writing of 'the incontrovertible fact that such artists as Shakespeare or Dickens are very little *individuals* at all' Lewis argues that 'they are, as a matter of fact, a very great and numerous crowd' ('Artist', 174). Rather than the crowd 'producing' great artists who are then independent of, or even opposed to it, as he claimed it did in 'The Foxes' Case', Lewis now sees genius as being a result of an individual becoming a crowd:

universal creators are in the truest sense mass-artists; and even such an artist as the author of *Don Juan*, at the moment of production of such a masterpiece, has ceased to be *an individual* in any very real or valid sense. The stamp of what we choose to call "genius" [...] is

precisely that the individual has externalized himself, has become purely an instrument, almost a common-property, in fact. ('Artist', 174)

The genius is seen as an individual who can, to return to the words of Cattleman, 'train himself *to act its mood*, so that he [can] persuade its emotion to enter him properly'. In *Enemy of the Stars* Hanp, very much under the influence of Arghol's self-centred philosophising, considers himself, and comes to the conclusion that:

Too many things inhabited together in this spirit for cleanliness or health. Is one soul too narrow an abode for genius?

To have humanity inside you – to keep a doss-house! At least impossible to organise on such a scale.

People are right who would disperse these impure monopolies!
(*ES*, 107)

Here the presence of the crowd within the individual is seen as a cause for disgust. However, in 'The Artist as Crowd' the image of the individual with humanity dwelling inside of him is redeployed, and this time seen in a much more positive light. However, Lewis's assertion that the truly great artist is the crowd does not mean that any member of the crowd can be one: 'The Artist is one of the rarest of people (in spite of the vast crowds of counterfeits), the politician is one of the commonest' ('Artist', 173). This rarity means that 'really [...] the artist, whose chief virtue must be his egotism, is bound to appear as one of the capital offenders against the principles of a Commune' ('Artist', 173). Lewis's attempt to present the artist as a non-egotistic figure, amenable to 'the principles of a Commune', results in the reclaimed image of the artist as crowd. The idea that an artist or an individual can embody the spirit of a people is not unique to Lewis by any means. However, it is interesting that Lewis expresses this idea quite as clearly as he does for it represents a u-turn from his previous belief that 'the individual personality' is in conflict with the crowd. Lewis's idea that 'The heroic crowd immediately produces a Lenin or a Shakespeare, even if the person so produced contradicts all the principles presiding at its

conjunction' ('Foxes', 122) is transformed into a far more harmonious vision, in which the individual produced by the crowd embodies the crowd.

Although Lewis's turn to the idea of the artist as crowd may seem to break decisively with the undercurrent of disgusted elitism of his earlier thinking on crowds, his new found friendliness towards the 'principles of [the] Commune' has its own dark side. Lewis's praise for Hitler in 1930, examined in Chapter Four, depends on such an idea of the man of the crowd, of the 'individual [who] has externalized himself, [who] has become purely an instrument, almost a common-property, in fact' ('Artist', 174). Lewis writes that 'Adolf Hitler is just a very typical german "man of the people" [...] Hitler is *The German Man*' (H, 31-2); and that 'the German Nation [...] must always be infinitely more formidable when acting as *one man*' (H, 33). The idea that the individual is stronger when he is a crowd, articulated in 'The Code of a Herdsman', is here supplemented by the notion that the crowd is more formidable when embodied in an individual. Lewis does not see Hitler as an egoistic hero, distinguished by his exceptional individuality, but precisely as an individual who has 'externalised himself' and become 'common-property'. As I argued in Chapter Four, Lewis's support for Nazism entailed a reversal of his dislike for mass-society and the idea of race as a ground for identity; it also necessitated a new attitude towards the crowd. His image of a Nazi crowd as subject to 'something like the physical pressure of one immense, indignant thought' (H, 10-11), and his support for the Nazi ideal of 'Identical rhythms in the arteries and muscles' (H, 107), all rely on the image of the crowd as a giant undifferentiated organism. To paraphrase 'The Code of a Herdsman', Lewis seems to have fallen into the vulgarity of assuming the crowd to be 'one ego'.

The Apes of God:

‘A constantly agitated firmament of shadows’

If *Hitler* demonstrates Lewis going over to the side of the crowd in a most enthusiastic and unwise manner, then *The Apes of God* (1930), published the same year as the articles which later became the book *Hitler*, shows another side to Lewis’s thinking about crowds and individuals. *The Apes of God* can be seen as a satire on the crowd-mentality of the cultured upper-classes, those ‘vast crowds’ of counterfeit artist Lewis complained of in ‘The Artist as Crowd’. The guided tour which Daniel Boleyn, the novel’s unheroic protagonist, is given by Horace Zagreus, his svengali, can be seen as a journey of discovery within the crowd, seeking out its typical components for Herdsman-style mockery. *The Apes of God* is itself a very crowded book, stuffed with characters who are given little sense of personality or individuality, and one of the features of the book is the ultimate similarity between Horace and Dan and the art-crowd they frequent and seek to mock. Because of the crowded nature of *The Apes of God* I will not be able to examine it in its entirety, but will focus my attention on the last two parts of the book: ‘Lord Osmund’s Lenten Party’ and ‘The General Strike’.

The guests at Lord Osmund’s party have some of the typical features of the modern idea of ‘the crowd’. When the guests are first introduced into the narrative they are described as ‘a human tide’ which ‘had its peculiar voice’ (AG, 349). This portrayal of the guests as a tide is reminiscent of Cattleman’s perception of the crowd as a ‘cold night tide’ and the idea that it has a single ‘voice’ rather than many ‘voices’ gives an impression of homogeneity that is typical of the modern idea of the crowd. The fact that Osmund’s party is a fancy-dress one is exploited to emphasise the false and theatrical nature of the crowd in attendance, and give it a sense of unreality:

A constantly agitated firmament of shadows, lost in the timbered roof
– the rushing, slovenly-dressed hired waiters – a scratch troop of

flustered women – everything sustains the air of restless improvisation, a sort of quaint, shabby lavishness, down to the cheap and perfunctory disguises of the guests. (AG, 350)

Osmund's crowd is presented as essentially homogenous, the variety of costumes failing to disguise the essential uniformity beneath:

As far as possible, then, the generality of this assemblage are physically identical: and the pattern is a pallid chorister of seventeen – gelded or drained of all the grossness of sex by a succubus or something at birth. (AG, 351)

The presentation of the crowd as youthful and sexlessly homosexual allows Lewis to sneer at what he sees as its shoddy campness without according it any sexual energy: sexuality is used to emphasise the mindlessness of the crowd, but it is a useless and insubstantial sexuality, which poses no threat and involves no messy physical enjoyment. As we saw in Chapter Three, Lewis associated homosexuality – of the non-‘true-blue’ kind – as a fashion indicative of the homogeneity and weakness of modern society and its avoidance of responsibility, and the generality of the crowd presented here display these characteristics as well. The guests are not, however, presented as totally uniform: ‘To the above law of the pallid rabble of the osmundian social system, a few exceptions only can be distinguished, here and there’ (AG, 351-2). Who exactly these ‘exceptions’ are is never made fully clear, most of the obvious candidates being compromised in some way. Horace Zagreus, for example, is exposed as a charlatan who is very much one of the chattering classes he seeks to mock and dissect. Starr-Smith, the Blackshirt, does not represent a genuine fascist alternative to the inane crowd of guests, but is himself in cheap fancy dress:

“Why do you suppose I am here with two more, who are volunteers, as ‘fascists’ of all things, to-night? Nothing to do with *Fascismo* – the last thing – can you guess? It’s because I picked up three khaki shirts for a few pence and dyed them black – the whole outfit for the three of us did not cost fifteen bob! That is the reason.” (AG, 509)

The fact that he had a ticket for six but could only muster three fake fascists is further proof that his politics is nothing more than another shoddy performance.

The character who is most an 'exception' to the crowd is Pierpoint, the mysterious guiding mind behind Zagreus's exploits and the issuer of several encyclicals that schematically enunciate Lewis's point of view. However, Pierpoint cannot be seen as a 'character' in the normal sense, as he never directly appears in the narrative. This non-appearance ensures Pierpoint's individuality, but at the cost of making him completely insubstantial. Pierpoint may be above and beyond the crowd, but, unlike the crowd, there is considerable doubt whether he actually exists. Unlike Multum in 'The Crowd Master' Pierpoint is not presented as both 'of the Crowd and individually conscious' but as completely detached, relying on others for contact with and information about the crowd he criticises. This complete detachment may guarantee non-contamination but it also prevents Pierpoint from having any force as a character and makes his pronouncements unconvincing as statements in a work of fiction.

Pierpoint occupies one position of absence in *The Apes of God*: another, opposed position is filled by the crowd of the General Strike of 1926. The crowd of the Strike appears at the end of *The Apes of God*, or rather, to be more precise, it doesn't appear at all, but its presence is felt: 'The whole townland of London was up in arms and as silent as the grave' (AG, 618). Daniel Boleyn does not realise that the strike is happening, and walks across London to meet some friends, a journey that is, in the opinion of his friends, extremely dangerous for a 'gentleman'. However, Daniel does not directly encounter the strike, but is approached by a succession of concerned gentleman which, in his ignorance, he finds overly forward:

A good many motor-cars were coming along the big street and Dan could not help remarking that several gentlemen driving in them alone looked at him, as if they knew him. [...] He could not understand this unscrupulous behaviour. Usually people in motor-cars minded their own business and it was only from pedestrians that one had to fear any low familiarity coming from strangers, which one

was liable to meet with, and which made walking in London so unpleasant. (AG, 614)

Ironically, the very people trying to protect Daniel from the supposedly violent but strangely absent crowd of strikers themselves become perceived by Daniel as a dangerous and threatening crowd, whom, he thinks, despite appearances, 'could not possibly be *gentlemen*' (AG, 614). Intended acts of chivalrous upper-class solidarity are transformed into unwanted and threatening advances, charged with homosexual tension: the libidiously unrestrained revolutionary crowd does not appear as such but in the form of those ostensibly opposed to it, who take on some of its characteristics. Just as Pierpoint generates a number of pseudo-individuals, Zagreus being the most prominent, the General Strike produces a pseudo-crowd.

Paul Edwards argues that the 'reported violence' of the General Strike 'lacks a sexual element' and so is not 'directly Dionysian' in a Sorelian fashion.²⁶ While he is correct that the General Strike is not presented as a carnivalesque outpouring of libido, Edwards is wrong to say that it 'lacks a sexual element': The pseudo-crowd of gentlemen and policemen that uncannily takes the place of the genuinely revolutionary crowd is perceived by Dan as a homosexual threat. When he encounters a bus full of policemen, Dan's reaction suggests something like 'homosexual panic': 'the sight of all those darkly-dressed brutes all together, with their peaked helmets, made him hot' and 'he did not wish to catch their eyes' (AG, 614). And when he is offered a lift by a gentleman, Dan is threatened by the proximity involved:

At length a gentleman by himself (or with the deceptive appearance of one) more forward than the rest, actually began to go slower with his machine and came in with it quite near to the edge of the pavement, until he could have touched him and the fellow smiled in the most open way, as if he had been acquainted. (AG, 614)

²⁶ Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, p. 356.

Dan's panic here provokes anxiety not only about increased proximity but about also the trustworthiness of appearances, is typical of upper-class anxiety about working-class crowds, and surely contains 'a sexual element'. Dan is upset that he is so 'rudely accost[ed] without on his side the provocation of a glance', a thought that betrays the possibility that he might have glanced, and connects with his concern not to catch the eyes of the policemen (AG, 615). Unfortunately for Dan, in trying to avoid this forward gentleman he finds his glance distracted by a window-display which only increases his sense of libidinous panic:

Dan walked sideways a few feet, he was pretending all the time to be engrossed with the purchases, as if he wanted to buy what was there. Unluckily as it turned out, this was the inside of a lady's bedroom, in the shop. There were two ladies undressed. The ladies were nothing but wax and puppets only but they were two terribly lifelike undressed women, and wherever he looked their eyes seemed to be seeking him out to smile at him. All sorts of nether garments for nude ladies were there – some were horribly round and there were splits in them with buttons – he blushed all the way up the backs of his legs. He had a centripetal shame in him, for all this immodesty – though in this case it was wax decoy-ducks, and not actual ladies. For nothing in the world would he be found looking! (AG, 615)

Again, Dan's panic is provoked by the untrustworthiness of appearances – even though the dummies are 'nothing but wax and puppets only' they are still 'terribly lifelike'; the possibility of sexual excitement – he finds the displayed underwear 'horribly round' and its 'splits' cause him to blush; and an anxiety about where to look – the mannequins' eyes seem to 'seek him out' and he is determined not to 'be found looking' at them. Faced with this uncanniness of the unreal, Dan tries to turn back to the real:

It would be better he almost felt to confront that person who had halted behind him in his car rather than to go on standing there. But the gentleman had accosted some other passers-by and they had got into the car with him. He could see it going on plainly in the window-glass. There were other gentlemen passing slowly in cars he could see – one or two wore smiles, and one beckoned to a somebody invitingly. He rushed from where he had been standing without looking up. (AG, 615)

Qualities associated with the revolutionary crowd – an outburst of inappropriate sexuality, the breakdown of the security of appearances, a threatening physical proximity – appear even though the crowd itself does not. That the crowd manifests itself only by its effects and never directly appears as substantial physical cause indicates that it occupies the place of ‘the Real’. Like the ‘single, isolated, direct sensation’ imagined in *Time and Western Man*, the crowd ‘however “real” [...] in one way and perhaps violent’ does ‘not yet bear with it the consciousness of *reality* or of *belief* and so has a ‘dream quality’ (see Chapter One and *TWM*, 549). The General Strike is not directly represented as an event of mass demonstrations or mob violence but indirectly in the form of a phantasmagorical and untrustworthy cityscape, populated by ungentlemanly gentlemen and ‘terribly lifelike’ mannequins.

The intrusion of ‘the Real’ of the crowd in the form of the absent General Strike is prefigured by Dan’s discovery of ‘the Real’ of his body, what Žižek calls the ‘palpitation’ of ‘what goes on beneath the surface’.²⁷ Unreasonably accused by Zagreus of behaving like a brute at Osmund’s party, Dan examines his body, which he had considered that of a ‘maidenly young man’ and discovers that he is a ‘blackguard and rib-breaker’:

he scrutinized the remarkable muscles in his hand – tracking them under the skin and lying in wait for them as if they were hidden fishes, as they rose to the surface disturbing the cuticle. Especially ferocious were those connected with the thumb. He had never suspected before the presence of all these monsters of muscles – only just inside! Thoroughly horror-struck, but determined to go through with it, he bent down and got hold of the leading muscles of his calves, which were well hidden but had great bodies like scottish salmon, and in each thigh there was at least a strapping life-size sturgeon. His body was swarming. (*AG*, 612-3)

Although Dan’s body is clearly not that of a brute, and his perception of it as such is entirely coloured by Zagreus’s exaggerated and self-serving

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 116.

accusations, this self-scrutiny is significant, for it shows Dan becoming aware of his body as a composite object, which contains other, apparently non-human bodies within it. Like Margot's attempt to grapple onto Victor's fish-like muscles in *The Revenge for Love* (see Chapter One and *RL*, 163), Dan's awareness of 'what goes on beneath the surface' prefigures a weakening of his sense of 'reality'. This fragmentation of the body is near-simultaneous with the strange non-emergence of the revolutionary crowd, and both events represent the breakdown of what had been considered harmonious and unified 'realities' – the individual and society. After six-hundred pages of unrelenting and tiresome description of the external surfaces of a small subsection of the privileged top layer of society 'what goes on beneath' is finally introduced into the narrative of *The Apes of God*, exposing the superficiality of what went before.

This intrusion of 'the Real' at the end of *The Apes of God* is significant precisely because it is undramatic: rather than being torn apart by a violently physical mob, the 'reality' of the upper-class crowd is ruptured by its own reaction to the never fully present threat of the working-class crowd. Likewise, Dan's sense of his own personal 'reality' is broken by self-scrutiny of the mundane muscles of his hands and legs: his bodily surface is not invaded or even threatened but 'what goes on beneath' makes itself known nevertheless. Lewis's portrayal of 'the Real' of the body and of the crowd attests to their inseparability from what appears to be opposed to them: even though 'the Real' does not appear as such it is always there, inseparable from the surface 'reality' which seeks to hide it from view.

Conclusion

The central question of this thesis is one of grounding: Lewis's work deals extensively with the problem of what can function as a ground – for identity, for distinction, even for reality itself – in the modern world. The sense that the basis for existence is a problem is one of the fundamental features of modernity, and of the culture it produces. Lewis's concerns about grounding indicate an anxious feeling of groundlessness, a feeling that what was once stable can no longer be taken for granted. For example, Lewis's concern with race does not arise from a self-assured conviction of racial superiority, or even a certainty that racial distinction exists and is significant, but from an anxiety about what it is that grounds cultural difference, on both an individual and a collective level. His insistence that Shakespeare's genius cannot be attributed to the biological factor of race is a result of his concern that everything can be grounded in the body, leaving the mind redundant. His turn to the corporeal rhetoric of Nazi racial ideology reflects a feeling that all other grounds for cultural distinction have already been pulled from beneath his feet, and that the body is the only solid thing left on which politics can be based. These two examples illustrate the double nature of his anxiety about grounding: on the one hand, he is concerned that grounding can be too solid and rigid, leading to a reductive determinism that extinguishes the role of the individual; and on the other hand, he is worried that the absence of any ground at all leads to a vacuous homogeneity in which nothing of value can be discerned at all.

Lewis's anxiety is exacerbated because he is not able to just simply believe in what he wants to believe in. As we saw in Chapter One, belief was for him a key philosophical concept, without which the reality and stability of the world could not be guaranteed; but as we have also seen, the idea of unmasking, of exposing 'the Real' thing behind the facade of

belief, was a central feature of his imagination. This mismatch between what he believed in – or wanted to believe in, or believed that he believed in – and what he could see and imagine is a central tension in his work, and is a template for the contradictions between theory and rhetoric that characterise his work.

The body is significant in this tension between belief and perception because in Lewis's work it can function both as an emblem of the solidity and definition which he wanted to believe in, and as the agent of the breakdown of distinction and difference which he could not help but perceive and imagine. Lewis himself was at least partially aware of this double valence of the body, as is shown by, for example, his rather tortuous argument about the difference between Nazi 'blood-feeling' and a Romantic and Whitmanesque version of the same thing. As we saw in Chapter Four, Lewis argues that the Nazis 'invoke [blood-feeling] on behalf of a greater *concentration*' whereas Whitman and those like him seek 'to enlist this sort of fleshy second-sight in the service of *diffusion*' (*H*, 106). The difference between 'concentration' and 'diffusion' is never really explained, and ultimately this distinction is only one of rhetorical emphasis, not grounded in anything solid. Lewis's turn to the rhetoric of the body as a ground of racial and cultural difference is as much about belief as it is about any notion of the body as real and solid. Even at the height of his enthusiasm for the corporeal Lewis cannot find the unadorned body an adequate ground for anything, and he is obliged to clothe it in a rhetoric of 'concentration', simultaneously admitting that the same objective ground can also service the diametrically opposed rhetoric of 'diffusion'. The body on its own grounds nothing, but belief in it can ground anything. Although this formulation is theoretically consistent with his claim in *Time and Western Man* that 'we are surface creatures only' and that 'reality is simply belief' it remains unsatisfactory as belief remains ungrounded, and the question of what exactly should be believed in is left open and undetermined. In *Hitler*, Lewis claims to believe in 'concentration' rather than 'diffusion', but he cannot disguise this choice as anything other than an ungrounded personal preference.

For Lewis, the body may have seemed to promise a stable ground in a rapidly changing and uncertain world, but the solidity it delivered was one of undifferentiated thingness in which distinctions and difference were erased altogether rather than grounded more firmly. The problem for Lewis is that while the unmediated body delivers nothing but mindless reification, to do away with the body altogether leads to an unreal vacuum in which nothing is grounded and nothing seems to exist. Like Margot in *The Revenge for Love*, Lewis grapples on to the body when he needs to ground his sense of 'reality', and like Margot he finds himself confronted with the unmanageable spectre of 'the Real'. This ability of the body to represent both the solidity of 'reality' and the disintegration of 'the Real' is, as I have shown, one of its key features in Lewis's work. Like the peons in *The Childermass* the apparent solidity of the body vanishes when looked at too hard.

Lewis's recourse to the body as the final ground for identity and belief, and the failure of the body to provide what he desires it to, is well illustrated by his turn to the eye as the basis of his critical position in *Time and Western Man*. In the preface to the second, more theoretical book of *Time and Western Man* Lewis attempts to adumbrate his 'exclusively "one-sided" position', and to do so tries to give 'some compendious idea of the manner in which [he] regard[s] the claims of *individuality*' (*TWM*, 131). Lewis claims that, although man is 'the most detached and eclectic of creatures', his life must be 'centred upon some deep-seated instinct or some faculty' if he is to find 'a natural exclusiveness necessary to proper functioning' (*TWM*, 132). This 'proper functioning' consists of the possession of enough stability and solidity to resist the flux of the world:

For our only terra firma in a boiling and shifting world is, after all, our "self." That must cohere for us to be capable at all of behaving in any way but as mirror-images of alien realities, or as the most helpless and lowest organisms, as worms or as sponges. (*TWM*, 132)

The 'self' here is seen as the basis for 'us', as some 'deep-seated' phenomenon, almost beneath individuality as it were, which supports the

individual in their 'eclectic' pursuits and critiques. Yet this idea of the self does not satisfy Lewis's search for a ground to his intellectual activities, and he seeks to establish what this deep-seated self is, in turn, grounded upon.

Lewis claims that he 'will fix [his] attention upon those things that have most meaning for [him]', and that in so doing he will 'do [his] best to modify or defeat' anything which 'seems to [him] to contradict or threaten those things', and equally try and 'strengthen' those things which agree with them (*TWM*, 132). Lewis is aware of the possibility that such a confrontational and oppositional mode of self-formation may lead to 'the heraclitean "injustice of the opposites"' but sees such an injustice as inevitable: 'But how can we evade our destiny of being "an opposite," except by becoming some grey mixture, that is in reality just nothing at all?' (*TWM*, 132). Having easily reconciled himself to the idea of being an 'opposite', Lewis continues to define his 'deep-seated' basis, emphasising its 'exclusiveness' and autonomy:

this fixation shall be upon something fundamental, quite underneath all the flux: and this will in no way prevent my vitality from taking at one time one form, at another another, provided, in spite of those occupations, on the surface, of different units of experience, the range of my sensibility observe the first law of being, namely to maintain its identity; and that the shapes it chooses for experiment shall agree with that dominant principle, and such shapes not be adopted without rhyme or reason, at the dictate of fashion or some casual interest, just because they happen to be there, in an eternal mongrel itch to *mix*, in undirected concupiscence, with *everything* that walks or crawls. (*TWM*, 132)

Lewis's search for identity and a 'dominant principle' on which to ground his critical position results in a model of self-formation in which power is central:

I have allowed these contradictory things to struggle together, and the group that has proved the most powerful I have fixed upon as my most essential ME. This decision has not, naturally, suppressed or banished the contrary faction, almost equal in strength, indeed, and

even sometimes in the ascendant. And I am by no means above spending some of my time with this domestic Adversary. All I have said to myself is that always, when it comes to the pinch, I will side and identify myself with the powerfulest Me, and in its interests I will work. (*TWM*, 132-3)

In Lewis's riotous model of the self a part seizes control and promotes its own interests, rather than governing for the benefit of the whole. Lewis grounds his position not in terms of ethical or rational rightness but in terms of power: out of many contenders it is the 'powerfulest' which gains ascendancy and the right to govern. Selfhood is seen as the product of violent contingency rather than of sublime necessity, and Lewis does not try to hide the fundamental partiality of the self produced in this way:

As to what this formally fixed "self" is, and how to describe it, I have already plainly indicated how I would go about that. From the outset I gave away the principle of my activity, and made no disguise of its partisan, even its specialist, character. So my philosophic position could almost be called an occupational one, except that my occupation is not one that I have received by accident or mechanically inherited, but is one that I chose as responding to an exceptional instinct or bias. (*TWM*, 133)

The 'self' is ultimately seen as grounded in choice rather than determined by biological factors, and significantly this choice is figured in terms of labour: it is an 'occupation'. The political model for Lewis's idea of selfhood is not the divine right of kings or the popular will of democracy, but the violent struggle of occupational syndicates. The philosophical position from which Lewis launches his criticism of modernity is a thoroughly modern one, modelled on the specialisation and competition of modern labour, rather than on any ancient or organic template.

Lewis grounds this specialised position in the body, or, more precisely, in a particular organ of the body:

Whatever the Marquis de Sade said about life or things in general, you could be in no doubt as to what his remarks would come back to in the end; you would know that they all would have the livery of the

voluptuary, that they would all be hurrying on the business of some painful and elaborate pleasure of the senses, that they would be devising means to satisfy an overmastering impulse to feel acutely in the regions set aside for the spasms of sex. With as much definiteness as that, whatever I, for my part, say, can be traced back to an organ; but in my case it is the *eye*. It is in the service of the things of vision that my ideas are mobilized. (*TWM*, 133-4)

The eye is not chosen as the central organ of Lewis's philosophy because of any innate qualities which elevate it above other organs, but because it is the one to which he is occupationally attached. By explicitly grounding his philosophy in occupational interest rather than on a supposedly disinterested reason, Lewis allows, even if he does not claim, a degree of relativism: if another organ had proved to be the 'powerfullest', then it, rather than the eye, would have mobilised his ideas. Theoretically Sade's position is as valid as Lewis's, as it too 'can be traced back to an organ', and is based on the 'overmastering impulse' of a particular part of the self. The eye is, to use the language of *Tarr*, merely one of the 'indignant plebs' of Lewis's 'glorious organism', but the one which has proved the 'powerfullest' and so taken command.

Lewis eye-based specialist position may seem like a weak one on which to base philosophical argument: a matter of personal interest and preference, rather than of disinterested logic and rational discourse. However, even putting aside any such criticisms, Lewis's choice of the eye as the ground for his philosophy runs into difficulties in *Time and Western Man* itself, and on its own terms. In the chapter 'The Object Conceived as King of the Physical World' Lewis takes on the arguments of philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead, and C. D. Broad whom he sees as dangerously relativistic and too concerned with time and flux, at the expense of his preferred qualities of space and stability. Lewis takes issue with the importance accorded to the observer by these theories, in particular Broad's claim that:

Whenever a penny looks to me elliptical, what really happens is that I am aware of an object which is, in fact, elliptical. . . . When I look at a

penny from the side, what happens is this: I have a sensation, whose object is an elliptical brown sensum: and this sensum is related in some specially intimate way to certain round physical object, viz. the penny. (Quoted in *TWM*, 387)

Lewis sees this argument as against 'Common-sense', which, he argues, 'supposes that a penny keeps its shape and size as we move about, while out "sensa," or complex of appearances of the penny alters' (*TWM*, 387). Lewis sees this view of the world as 'of the nature of the cartesian return to *naked, direct, vision*' which is, in turn, 'affiliated with Bergson's plunge into the sensational flux' (*TWM*, 388). As we saw in Chapter One, Lewis's epistemology was opposed to unmediated sensation – the naked and direct plunge which he complains of here is extremely similar to what Žižek calls 'the passion for the Real'. His argument is complicated when he remembers that he claimed to base his philosophy on the eye and that his ideas were mobilised in 'the service of the things of vision' (*TWM*, 134). Lewis portrays the world of sensation he is arguing against as one in which vision is primary, claiming that it is a world in which 'the *image* comes to life, and the picture, under suitable conditions, moves and lives inside its frame' (*TWM*, 392). Lewis also argues that in such a world an illusion 'would be real – since it appeared real', a formulation that is remarkably similar to his own assertion that '*Reality* is in fact simply *belief*' (*TWM*, 392, 351). Lewis is aware of the apparent contradiction between his claim that vision was primary for him and his criticism of its primacy for others, and tries to explain that if looked at properly there is no contradiction at all. Lewis recalls that he 'intimated that this essay was to be an attempt to provide something in the nature of a *philosophy of the eye*' and points out that this description of his position could be seen as 'the opposite of the truth' (*TWM*, 392). However, Lewis claims that this opposition only holds if '*you wish to isolate the Eye*' and adds that 'it is against isolation that we contend' (*TWM*, 392). Lewis claims that his position is not based upon such isolation, writing that 'we wish to repose, and materially to repose, in the crowning human sense, the visual sense', and that 'we *refuse* [...] to retire into the abstraction and darkness of an aural and tactile world'

(*TWM*, 392). Lewis claims that vision on his sense is on the side of ‘reality’, writing that:

That sensation of overwhelming *reality* which vision alone gives is the reality of “common-sense,” as it is that reality we inherit from pagan antiquity. And it is indeed on that “reality” that I am basing all I say. But “a philosophy of the eye” would be a description diametrically opposed to the truth, if it were to be the expression of our technical position in this phase of the argument. (*TWM*, 392)

Lewis proposes a ‘philosophy of the eye’ which does not ‘isolate’ the eye: however, as we saw earlier, his model of selfhood, from which the idea of the ‘philosophy of the eye’ develops, relies upon the separation of organs and the fragmentation of the body. In the later argument Lewis specifically attacks the fragmentation of the body, arguing that it is a cause of the larger social problems he diagnoses. The image-centred world and the lack of reality of which he complains is, he argues, produced by the separation of the senses of vision and touch:

it is because of the subjective disunity due to the separation, or separate treatment, of the senses, principally of sight and of touch, that the external disunity has been achieved. It is but another case of the *morcellement* of the *one* personality, in this case into a tactile-observer on the one hand and a visual-observer on the other, giving different renderings of the same thing. Its results must be the disintegration, finally, of any “public” thing at all. (*TWM*, 393-4)

The ‘*morcellement* of the *one* personality’ of which Lewis complains of here was the precondition for the model on selfhood he proposes earlier in the book. There, as we saw earlier, personality is seen as distinctly non-unified, with opposed factions clashing in a power struggle for overall control. Lewis’s concern about the ‘disintegration [...] of any “public” thing at all’ is also at odds with his earlier account of his critical position. There, in his account of his ‘exclusively “one-sided” position’, he unabashedly proclaimed ‘its partisan, even its specialist, character’ and was frank about its occupational basis: considerations of the public good, even on a highly

abstract epistemological level, were not mentioned at all, and his identification of his interests with the ‘powerfullest Me’ set the individualistic tone. Lewis’s later arguments characteristically provide interesting criticism of his earlier position:

we would emphasize that our ideal, objective, world, which was wrought into a unity – the common ground of imaginative reality on which we all meet – is being destroyed in favour of a fastidious egoism, based on a disintegration of the complex unity of the senses, and a granting of privileges to vision, in its raw, immediate and sensational sense. (*TWM*, 394)

Lewis’s earlier cultivation of the ‘powerfullest Me’ and the mobilisation of his ideas ‘in the service of vision’ are good examples of this ‘fastidious egoism’ and its fragmentation and favouritism of the senses. However, it is important to note that in the above passage Lewis writes of vision ‘in its raw, immediate and sensational sense’, which implies that the idealised vision which mobilised him was one which was not raw, not immediate, and not sensational. The idea of a non-sensational sense is hard to visualise, but, using terms from *The Childermass*, would seem to be more similar to Pullman’s ‘intellectual consciousness’ than Satters’ ‘optical consciousness’ (*C*, 89). The ‘vision’ in whose service Lewis claims his ideas are mobilised appears to be not only non-sensational but non-optical as well, presented more as an intellectual abstraction than as a physical reality.

This hostility to vision in its most basic sense may seem self-contradictory but is not wholly surprising as there is a distinctly anti-optical strand in Lewis’s work. In his ‘Essay on the Objective of Plastic Art in Our Time’ (1922), for example, Lewis argues that vision is opposed to imagination, claiming that “The practical and, as we say, “prosaic” character of the function of our visual sense does not enable us to experience through it normally a full emotional impression’ (‘Essay’, 214).

Lewis also claims that the insufficiency of vision affects social relations: ‘We are all, in a sense even, so thoroughly hidden from each

other because we see each other' ('Essay', 214). In this essay this insufficiency is presented in a negative light, with the superior qualities of the imagination opposed to it. Lewis does not see vision as insufficient in terms of knowledge but in terms of emotion; in fact, in terms of knowledge, he sees vision as over-sufficient: 'We are given by the eye *too much*: a surfeit of information and "hard fact", that does not, taken literally, tally with our completer values for the objects in question' ('Essay', 214). This 'incessant analysis of the objects presented to us' results in 'the stripping of things and people by the eye of their more significant and complete emotional vesture' ('Essay', 214). In this sense vision can be seen as fundamentally comic as it is objective rather than subjective, and objectively there are no 'persons' but only 'things' absurdly pretending to be 'persons'. In 'The Meaning of the Wild Body' Lewis wrote that 'fundamental self-observation' was a 'dangerous form of absolute revelation' which had lethal effects ('Meaning', 158). To avoid this dangerous and depersonalising objectivity vision, in Lewis's eyes, cannot be taken straight:

To make up, for the picture presented to us by the eye, a synthesis of a person or a thing, we must modify the order for which the eye is responsible, and eliminate much of the physical chaos that only serves to separate us from the imaginative truth we are seeking. ('Essay', 214)

This modification of visual data enables it to function imaginatively:

Everything received through the eye to the outside world has to be "treated" before it can be presented to the imagination with a chance of moving it. The law of this "treatment" is, first, a process of *generalization*. An intense particularization may, however, on the principle of extremes meeting, have the same effect. But, broadly, it is by a *generalization* of the subject-matter that you arrive at the rendering likely to be accepted by the imagination. I am using the word "imagination" to stand for that function of the mind that assesses and enjoys the purely useful work performed by the other faculties; the artist-principle in the mind, in short. ('Essay', 215)

This modification and treatment of the raw data received by the eye puts Lewis's idea of vision more in line with his epistemological dislike for the 'the Real'. However, it renders problematic the notion that the eye can function as a ground for his critical identity, as it makes vision in Lewis's preferred sense a secondary phenomenon, itself grounded on a primary sensational process to which it is opposed. Lewis's generalised vision is grounded upon vision 'in its raw, immediate and sensational sense', the vision to which it is opposed. This pattern of grounding a positive value on a negative value to which it is opposed is recurrent in Lewis's work: the mind is secondary to and predicated on the body, and the conceptual pairs of 'reality'-'the Real', person-thing, masculine-feminine, genius-race, and individual-crowd are all, at some time, seen as functioning in this way. On a more general level, one of process as well as of objects, the separation that Lewis so values and desires can be seen to be secondary to and predicated on a fundamental inseparability. As he writes in *The Lion and The Fox*, personality 'uses aptitudes and forces that it derives from the things it is destined to combat' (*LF*, 296), and this sense of the intermingling and consanguinity of opposites is inescapable in Lewis's work, even if he does not want it to be.

The grounding of positive values in the negative values to which they are opposed is a problem for Lewis not because he denies that this is what he is doing – in *Time and Western Man*, for example, he rhetorically asks 'how can we evade our destiny of being "an opposite," except by becoming some grey mixture, that is in reality just nothing at all?' (*TWM*, 132) – but because, even though he admits it, Lewis does not seem able to accept the insecurity fundamental to it. His attempt to ground his critical position in the organ of the eye is an attempt to find a secure identity in a single substantial bodily thing rather than in the abstract process of opposition. The problem for Lewis is that even by knowingly becoming 'an opposite' the 'grey mixture' which he seeks to avoid is never entirely escaped, a problem that is articulated more clearly and more comically in his fiction than in his theoretical work. Separation is never fully achieved, and the primary bodily matter from which the secondary phenomena of mind and

its correlates emerge is never absolutely transcended, and the prospect of comic collapse is always present.

Lewis's attempt to ground his identity in the eye demonstrates the way in which the body functions in his work: invoked as a ground it disintegrates when looked at too hard, but nevertheless does not disappear entirely. This tendency of the body both never to be there and always to be there is its most significant feature in Lewis's work. Its failure to function as a solid ground does not result in Lewis falling through to yet another potential ground. The body cannot be fully appropriated but neither can it be completely discarded: it is not just another 'false bottom' in an infinite regress of possible grounds.

Lewis is stuck with the body: it fails to provide a solid ground for identity, and yet it refuses to melt completely into air. This persistence of the body makes it a crucial sticking point in Lewis's work: it is stuck in the middle of the modern tensions of integration and separation, of reification and dematerialisation, of the thing and the person. The idea of the body never settles, never solidifies, never fully grounds itself or anything else, but perpetually oscillates between opposed conceptual poles and produces a series of compelling and contradictory images which attest to its implacable significance in Lewis's work.

Bibliography

Works by Wyndham Lewis

Mrs. Dukes' Millions, written ca. 1908-10, ed. Frank Davey, (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1977).

'A Young Soldier', in *The Egoist*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (March, 1916), p. 46.

Imaginary Letters, first published 1917-1918, (Glasgow: Wyndham Lewis Society, 1977).

Tarr: The 1918 Version, first published 1918, ed. Paul O'Keeffe, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1996).

The Caliph's Design: Architects! Where is your Vortex?, first published 1919, ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1986).

The Art of Being Ruled, first published 1926, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989).

The Lion and the Fox: The Rôle of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare, (London: G. Richards, 1927).

The Wild Body: A Soldier of Humour and Other Stories, first published 1927, (New York: Haskell House, 1970).

Time and Western Man, first published 1927, ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993).

Bibliography

The Childermass, first published 1928, (London & New York: Calder Publications & Riverrun Press, 2000).

Tarr, first published 1928, (London: John Calder, 1968).

Paleface: The Philosophy of the 'Melting-Pot', (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929).

The Apes of God, first published 1930, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1981).

The Roaring Queen, first intended for publication 1931, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973).

Hitler, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931).

The Diabolical Principle and The Dithyrambic Spectator, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931).

Doom of Youth, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932).

Snooty Baronet, first published 1932, ed. Bernard Lafourcade, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1984).

The Old Gang and the New Gang, (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1933)

Men Without Art, first published 1934, ed. Seamus Cooney, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1987).

Left Wings Over Europe: Or, How to Make a War About Nothing, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936).

Bibliography

Count Your Dead: They Are Alive! Or, A New War in the Making,
(London: Lovat Dickson, 1937).

Blasting and Bombardiering, first published 1937, (London: Calder and
Boyars, 1967).

The Revenge for Love, first published 1937, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock,
(Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1991).

The Mysterious Mr Bull, (London: Robert Hale, 1938).

The Jews, Are They Human?, (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.,
1939).

Wyndham Lewis the Artist: From Blast to Burlington House, (London:
Laidlaw & Laidlaw, 1939).

The Hitler Cult, (London: Dent, 1939).

America, I Presume, (New York: Howell, Soskin, 1940)

The Vulgar Streak, first published 1941, ed Paul Edwards, (Santa Barbara:
Black Sparrow Press, 1985).

Anglosaxony: A League that Works, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1941).

America and Cosmic Man, (London & Brussels: Nicholson & Watson,
1948).

Rude Assignment, first published 1950, ed. Toby Foshay, (Santa Rosa:
Black Sparrow Press, 1984).

Bibliography

Rotting Hill, first published 1951, ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1986).

The Writer and the Absolute, (London: Methuen, 1951).

Self Condemned, first published 1954, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1983).

The Demon of Progress in the Arts, (London: Methuen, 1954).

The Human Age: Book 2, Monstre Gai; Book 3, Malign Fiesta, (London: Methuen, 1955).

The Red Priest, (London: Methuen, 1956).

The Letters of Wyndham Lewis, ed. W. K. Rose, (London: Methuen, 1963).

Wyndham Lewis on Art: Collected Writings 1913-1956, ed. Walter Michel & C. J. Fox, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969).

Unlucky For Pringle: Unpublished and Other Stories, eds. C. J. Fox & Robert T. Chapman, (London: Vision Press, 1973).

Enemy Salvoes: Selected Literary Criticism, ed. C. J. Fox, (London: Vision Press, 1975).

Collected Poems and Plays, ed. Alan Munton, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1979).

The Complete Wild Body, ed. Bernard Lafourcade, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982).

Journey Into Barbary: Morocco Writings and Drawings, ed. C. J. Fox, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1983).

Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956, ed. Paul Edwards, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989).

The Essential Wyndham Lewis, ed. Julian Symons, (London: Vintage, 1991).

Works edited by Wyndham Lewis

Blast, Vol. 1, first published 1914, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1981).

Blast, Vol. 2, first published 1915, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1981).

The Tyro, No. 1, (April, 1921).

The Tyro, No. 2, (March, 1922).

The Enemy: A Review of Art and Literature, No. 1, first published 1927, ed. David Peters Corbett, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1994).

The Enemy, No. 2, first published 1927, ed. David Peters Corbett, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1994).

The Enemy, No. 3, first published 1929, ed. David Peters Corbett, (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1994).

Works by other authors

Adorno, Theodor W., *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno & Rolf Tiedeman, trans. & ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London: The Athlone Press, 1997).

Alexander, Samuel, *Space, Time, and Deity: The Gifford Lectures at Glasgow 1916-1918*, 2 vols., (London: Macmillan, 1966)

Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

Armstrong, Tim, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Ayers, David, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man*, (London: Macmillan, 1992).

Baker, Phil, 'Was he human?', *The Guardian*, November 18, 2000, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/biography/0,6121,399034,00.html>.

Baldick, Chris, *The Oxford English Literary History: Volume 10. 1910-1940: The Modern Movement*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Baudelaire, Charles, *The Prose Poems and La Fanfarlo*, trans. Rosemary Lloyd, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

_____, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

Bibliography

- Benda, Julien, *Belphégor*, trans. S. J. I. Lawson, (New York: Payson & Clark, 1929).
- Bergson, Henri, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, first published 1889, trans. F. L. Pogson, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001).
- _____, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, first published 1903, translated into English 1912, trans. T. E. Hulme, (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999).
- _____, *Matter and Memory*, 5th ed. 1908, trans. N. M. Paul & W.S. Palmer, (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
- _____, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, (London: Macmillan, 1911).
- _____, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton & Fred Rothwell, (London: Macmillan, 1911).
- Berkeley, George, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 2nd edition, 1734, ed. Jonathan Dancey, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Berman, Art, *Preface to Modernism*, (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
- Berman, Marshall, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (London & New York: Verso, 1983).
- Boothby, Richard, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology After Lacan*, (New York & London: Routledge, 2001).

Bibliography

- Bradbury, Malcolm & James McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, (London: Penguin, 1991).
- Bradshaw, David (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).
- Bridson, D. G., *The Filibuster: A Study of the Political Ideas of Wyndham Lewis*, (London: Cassell, 1972).
- Broad, C. D., *Scientific Thought*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1923).
- Brown, Dennis, 'Prophesying the Postmodern: Wyndham Lewis's *America and Cosmic Man*' in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 5, 1998), pp. 9-22.
- Brown, Richard S. G., "Nihilism: 'Thus Speaks Physiology'" in Tom Darby, Béla Egyed, Ben Jones (eds.), *Nietzsche and the Rhetoric of Nihilism*,
- Bürger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, first published in German 1974, trans. Michael Shaw, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
- _____, *The Decline of Modernism*, trans. Nicholas Walker, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).
- Burstein, Jessica, 'Waspish Segments: Lewis, Prosthesis, Fascism' in *Modernism/Modernity*, (Vol. 4, No. 2, 1997), pp. 139-64.
- Butler, Samuel, *The Notebooks of Samuel Butler*, ed. Henry Festing Jones, first published 1912, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985).

- Butler, Judith, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1993).
- Calinescu, Matei, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).
- Canetti, Elias, *Crowds and Power*, first published in German 1960, trans. Carol Stewart, (London: Phoenix Press, 2000).
- Carey, John, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939*, (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992).
- Carlston, Erin G., *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- Césaire, Aimé, *Discourse on Colonialism*, first published in French 1955, trans. J. Pinkham, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).
- Childs, Donald J., *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Cianci, Giovanni (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis: Letteratura/Pittura*, (Palermo: Sellerio editore, 1982).
- Clarke, Peter, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*, (London: Penguin, 1997).
- Coetzee, Frans & Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (eds.), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, (Providence & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995).

- Cohen, Milton A., 'Fatal Symbiosis: Modernism and the First World War' in Patrick J. Quinn & Steven Trout (eds.), *The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Modern Memory*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).
- Connolly, Cyril, *Enemies of Promise*, revised edition, first published 1938, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948)
- Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, (London & Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).
- _____, 'Unbinding Vision' in *October*, (No. 68, Spring 1994), pp. 21-44.
- _____, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, (London & Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999).
- Currie, Robert, *Genius: An Ideology in Literature*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974).
- Darby, Tom, Béla Egyed, & Ben Jones (eds.), *Nietzsche and the Rhetoric of Nihilism: Essays on Interpretation, Language and Politics*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989).
- Dasenbrock, Reed Way, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting*, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).
- Danius, Sara, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

- Davies, Alistair, 'Tarr: A Nietzschean Novel' in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1980).
- Descartes, René, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane & G. R. T. Ross, 2 Vols., (London: Cambridge University Press, 1931).
- Ebbatson, Roger, *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence*, (Brighton: Harvester Books, 1982).
- Edwards, Paul, 'Signifying Nothing: *The Revenge For Love*' in *Enemy News: Newsletter of the Wyndham Lewis Society*, (No. 15, Winter 1982), pp. 13-22.
- _____, "The Strange Actor" and "Semitic Discourse", in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 4, 1997), pp. 32-7.
- _____, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).
- Eksteins, Modris, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, first published 1989, (London: Papermac, 2000).
- Ferrall, Charles, *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)
- Flint, F. S., 'From *Poetry March 1913*', in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).
- Foshay, Toby Avar, *Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde: The Politics of the Intellect*, (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

Foster, Hal, 'Prosthetic Gods' in *Modernism/Modernity*, (Vol. 4, No. 2, 1997), pp. 5-38.

_____, *Prosthetic Gods*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press, 2004).

Frost, Laura, *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, first published 1975, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Gąsiorek, Andrzej, "The Cave-Men of the New Mental Wilderness" Wyndham Lewis and the Self in Modernity', in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 6, 1999), pp. 3-20.

_____, "Jujitsu for the Governed"? Wyndham Lewis and the Problem of Power', in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 8, 2001), pp. 30-50.

_____, *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism*, (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004).

Gilbert, Geoff, 'Shellshock, anti-Semitism, and the agency of the avant-garde', in David Peters Corbett (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Gillies, Mary Ann, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*, (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

Goldberg, David Theo, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

- Grierson, H. J. C., *The Background of English Literature and Other Collected Essays & Addresses*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1925).
- Griffin, Gabriele (ed.), *Difference in View: Women and Modernism*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994).
- Handley-Read, Charles (ed.), *The Art of Wyndham Lewis*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1951).
- Hardegen, Christine, 'Actors and spectators in the theatre of war: Wyndham Lewis's First World War art and literature', in David Peters Corbett (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Harris, Jose, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain, 1870-1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- Head, Philip, 'Ideology, Utopia, Myth; and Lewis's "Politics of the Intellect"', in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 4, 1997), pp. 20-31.
- Hewitt, Andrew, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993).
- _____, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- Higate, Paul R. (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*, (Westport, Connecticut & London: Praeger, 2003).
- Higonnet, Margaret Randolph, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1987).

Hobsbawm, Eric, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, (London: Abacus, 1995).

Hulme, T. E., *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, first published 1902, (London: Penguin, 1985).

Jameson, Fredric, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979).

_____, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, first published 1981, (London: Routledge, 2002).

_____, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (London & New York: Verso, 1991).

_____, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, (London & New York: Verso, 2002).

Julius, Anthony, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Kenner, Hugh, *Wyndham Lewis*, (London: Methuen, 1954).

_____, *The Pound Era: The Age of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Wyndham Lewis*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1972)

Kent, Susan Kingsley, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

- _____, 'Love and Death: War and Gender in Britain, 1914-1918', in Frans Coetzee & Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee, *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, (Providence & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995).
- Kush, Thomas, *Wyndham Lewis's Pictorial Integer*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981).
- Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London & New York: Routledge, 2001).
- _____, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, first published in French 1973, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York & London: Norton, 1981).
- Lane, Barbra Miller & Leila J. Rupp (eds.), *Nazi Ideology Before 1933: A Documentation*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).
- Lawrence, D. H., *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, 2 Vols., ed. Harry T. Moore, (London, Melbourne, Toronto: Heinemann, 1962).
- Le Bon, Gustave, *The Crowd*, first published in French 1895, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
- Leed, Eric J., *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- Levenson, Michael H., *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908 – 1922*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

- _____, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Levin, David Michael (ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).
- Loewenstein, Andrea Freud, *Loathsome Jews and Engulfing Women: Metaphors of Projection in the Works of Wyndham Lewis, Charles Williams, and Graham Greene*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 1993).
- Mao, Douglas, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- Marx, Karl, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- McClelland, J.S., *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).
- Melman, Billie (ed.), *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace 1870-1930*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1998).
- Meyers, Jeffrey, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis*, (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).
- Meyers, Jeffrey (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis: A Reevaluation*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1980).
- Michel, Walter, *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971).

- Miller, Tyrus, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999).
- Morrison, Paul, *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Paul de Man*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- Morrow, Bradford & Bernard Lafourcade, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Wyndham Lewis*, (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978).
- Mosse, George L., *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, (London, Melbourne & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1978).
- _____, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- Mullarkey, John (ed.), *The New Bergson*, (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).
- Munton, Alan, 'A Reading of *The Childermass*' in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis: A Reevaluation*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1980).
- _____, "Imputing Noxiousness": Aggression and Mutilation in Recent Lewis Criticism', in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 4, 1997), pp. 5-19.
- _____, 'Fantasies of Violence: The Consequences of Not Reading Wyndham Lewis', in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 5, 1998), pp. 31-50.
- _____, 'Wyndham Lewis: war and aggression', in David Peters Corbett (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

- _____, 'Mad and Bad: Lewis, Psychosis and the Culture of Psychiatry', in *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, (Vol. 8, 2001).
- Neilson, Brett, 'History's Stamp: Wyndham Lewis's *The Revenge for Love* and the Heidegger Controversy', *Comparative Literature*, 51, No. 1, 1999, pp. 24-42.
- Nicholls, Peter, *Ezra Pound: Politics, Economics and Writing: A Study of The Cantos*, (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1984).
- _____, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1995).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, first published 1887, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1974).
- _____, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, first published 1886, trans. & ed. Marion Faber, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- _____, *The Will To Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1968).
- Normand, Tom, *Wyndham Lewis the Artist: Holding the Mirror up to Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- _____, 'Wyndham Lewis, the anti-war war artist', in David Peters Corbett (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- North, Michael, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

- O'Keeffe, Paul, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000).
- Ortega y Gasset, José, *The Revolt of the Masses*, first published in Spanish 1930, trans. anon., (New York & London: 1993).
- Parker, David H., 'The Vorticist, 1914: The Artist as Predatory Savage', *Southern Review: Literary and Interdisciplinary Essays* 8, (1975), pp. 3-21.
- _____, 'Tarr and Wyndham Lewis's War-Time Stories', *Southern Review: Literary and Interdisciplinary Essays* 8, (1975), pp. 166-81.
- Peppis, Paul, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde: Nation and Empire, 1901-1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Perrino, Mark, *The Poetics of Mockery: Wyndham Lewis's The Apes of God and the Popularization of Modernism*, (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1995).
- Peters Corbett, David (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Platt, Len, *Aristocracies of Fiction: The Idea of Aristocracy in Late-Nineteenth-Century and Early-Twentieth-Century Literary Culture*, (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 2001).
- Porteus, Hugh Gordon, *Wyndham Lewis: A Discursive Exposition*, (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1932).

Bibliography

Praz, Mario, *The Romantic Agony*, first published in Italian, trans. Angus Davidson, (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

Pykett, Lyn, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

Quéma, Anne, *The Agon Of Modernism: Wyndham Lewis's Allegories, Aesthetics, and Politics*, (Lewisburg, Pa.; Cranbury, NJ.: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1999).

Quinn, Patrick J. & Steven Trout (eds.), *The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Modern Memory*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

Rado, Lisa (ed.), *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994).

____ (ed.), *Modernism, Gender, and Culture: A Cultural Studies Approach*, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997).

____, *The Modern Androgyne Imagination: A Failed Sublime*, (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

Rentoul, Robert Reid, *Race Culture; or, Race Suicide? A Plea for the Unborn*, (London & Felling-on-Tyne: Walter Scott Publishing Co, 1906).

Rosenberg, Alfred, *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Pois, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).

Schwartz, Sanford, *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth-Century Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

- Scott, Bonnie Kime, 'Jellyfish and Treacle: Lewis, Joyce, Gender and Modernism' in Beja Morris & Shari Benstock (eds.), *Coping With Joyce: Essays from the Copenhagen Symposium*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989).
- Scott, Bonnie Kime (ed.), *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- Searle, G. R., *Eugenics and Politics in Britain 1900-1914*, (Leyden: Noordhoff International Publishing, 1976).
- Segel, Harold B., *Body Ascendant: Modernism and the Physical Imperative*, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- Seltzer, Mark, *Bodies and Machines*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1992).
- Sherry, Vincent, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism*, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- _____, 'Anatomy of Folly: Wyndham Lewis, the Body Politic, and Comedy' in *Modernism/Modernity*, (Vol. 4, No. 2, 1997), pp. 121-38.
- _____, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- Showalter, Elaine, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*, (London: Virago Press, 1987).

- Sorel, Georges, *Reflections on Violence*, first published in French 1906, trans. T. E. Hulme, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1916).
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', first published 1985, in *The Spivak Reader*, eds. Donna Landry & Gerald MacLean, (New York & London: Routledge, 1996).
- Stevens, Hugh & Caroline Howlett (eds.), *Modernist Sexualities*, (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000).
- Stirner, Max, *The Ego and Its Own*, first published in German 1844, trans. Steven Tracy Byington, ed. David Leopold, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Stone, Dan, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002).
- Tate, Trudi, *Modernism, History and the First World War*, (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).
- Theweleit, Klaus, *Male Fantasies: Volume I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, first published in German 1977, trans. Stephen Conway in collaboration with Erica Carter & Chris Turner, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).
- Thompson, Anne, *The Eternal Duet of Existence: Dualism in Wyndham Lewis*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1992.
- Tratner, Michael, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

- Trotter, David, *The English Novel in History 1895-1920*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).
- _____, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Trotter, Wilfred, *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*, first published 1915, (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).
- Weininger, Otto, *Sex and Character*, authorised translation from the sixth German edition, (London: William Heineman; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906).
- Whitehead, Alfred North, *Science and the Modern World*, first published 1926, (London: Free Association Books, 1985).
- Woolf, Virginia, *Collected Essays*, 4 Vols., (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966).
- Wragg, David A., 'Aggression, aesthetics, modernity: Wyndham Lewis and the fate of art', in David Peters Corbett (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Young, Robert J. C., *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995).
- Žižek, Slavoj, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press, 1991).

Bibliography

- _____, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, (London & New York: Verso, 1994).
- _____, *The Plague of Fantasies*, (London & New York: Verso, 1997).
- _____, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*, (London & New York: Verso, 2001).
- _____, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, (London & New York: Verso, 2002).
- _____, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, (New York & London: Routledge, 2004).

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors, Chris Baldick and Len Platt, for their patience, diligence, and enthusiasm.

Thanks are also due to the following people for the various contributions, both scholarly and non-scholarly, that they have made to this project: Niall Anderson, Colin Brent, Jeremy Brent, Rita Brent, Helen Carr, Josh Cohen, Yaron Cohen, Elizabeth Crossley, Gethan Dick, Nikolai Duffy, Anna Hartnell, Meg Lovelock, Jane Millican, Bart Moore-Gilbert, Keren Omry, Lori Shelbourn, Mark Spelman, Derval Tubridy.

I would also like to thank The Arts and Humanities Research Council, whose generous funding made this project possible.